

Buying Britney: Pop Culture Icons to Cultural Brands

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Abstract

This thesis demonstrates that music stars who attain cultural icon status heavily contribute to the fashion styles of the time. Where as style and music have always had a connection, icons such as Britney Spears are now dictating popular style so much so that music artists are becoming full-fledged fashion designers. While much analysis is devoted to Britney Spears, her largest contributions do not lie in the rise of teenage sexuality, but in establishing music artists as vehicles of consumption. The artists' signature has now become a brand and a term "signabrand" has been created to define such a trend. To understand such a shift, a review of past literature devoted to fashion and music, largely consisting of subculture theory is examined, followed by a combination of content analysis, political economy, fashion and postmodern theory to address how music stars attain icon status and guide style.

Table of Contents

<u>Abstract</u>	i
<u>Table of Contents</u>	ii
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	iii
<u>Chapter One</u> <u>Introduction – The Search for Style is in your GhettoBlaster</u>	1-14
<u>Chapter Two</u> <u>The Perfect Fit: Popular Music as Popular Fashion</u>	15-34
<u>Chapter Three</u> <u>Thought That Rock Guitar Could Save My Generation</u> <u>(Turns Out Postmodernism Did): Culture and Commodification</u> <u>in Music Video and Clothing</u>	35-53
<u>Chapter Four</u> <u>Just Browsing or Celebrity Window Shopping: Popular Icons</u> <u>as Popular Fashion</u>	54-78
<u>Chapter Five</u> <u>Just Because I'm Sexy Does Not Mean I Want Sex.</u> <u>I May Want a Pair of Prada Shoes Instead:</u> <u>Music Icons as Popular Practice</u>	79-105
<u>Chapter Six</u> <u>Brand it Like Britney: Music Artists as Fashion Brands</u>	106-137
<u>Chapter Seven</u> <u>Conclusion: Subcultures Out, Signabrands in</u>	138-155
<u>Appendices</u>	156-165
<u>Works Cited</u>	166-182

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Introduction
Chapter One – The Search for Style is in your GhettoBlaster

Upon celebrating Joan Rivers' eighth anniversary on The Shopping Channel, cards were mailed out to past clients.¹ On the back of the card reads a "message from Joan":

Hello Canada,
The year was 1996, Britney traded in her diapers for diva delicates, Esther was known as Madonna and I made my debut at The Shopping Channel. Beginning Friday, October 22, set a date for anniversary number eight! I'm celebrating with great savings on fall-inspired jewelry pieces from my Classics Collection, stylish handbags with matching wrap, exquisite Faberge-inspired Christmas decorations and the launch of my new Pink Flowers fragrance – a scent that is to die for.
See you soon,
Joan

What do Britney Spears and Madonna have to do with The Shopping Channel? One would not automatically assume that their fans are avid watchers of Joan Rivers and/or the Shopping Channel. Joan Rivers, one assumes, would typically command an older audience – not one who listens to "Oops!...I Did It Again" or "Music" or at least not one who readily admits to it. Britney and Madonna are mentioned not because of their hits on the charts but rather because of the image they have created and what audiences, young and old, infer from it.

The images created by and of these artists stem from not their music per se, but from the aspects surrounding the music that become as integral as the record. Music videos, posters, paparazzi photos, magazine articles, as well as the standard music industry promotion help create a visual image that defines artist style. This style becomes so much a part of the artists' image that the music becomes secondary

to their look. What Britney or Madonna are wearing (or kissing) becomes as important as what single they are releasing. As Thomas de Zengotita states

Pop-music stars who stand for something across their appearances come as close as a mediated culture allows to genuine heroic stature. They are performers and they are real. Dylan, Madonna, Selena, Garth Brooks, Sinatra – these people helped millions of people define themselves. They instilled and reinforced values and conditioned people's life choices, *especially style, the attitude that gets you through the day* [emphasis added]. These star-types posit and reflect the selves their fans have chosen to be (2004:40).

Why do music stars and style go hand in hand? How is style related to music? Do music trends dictate fashion trends or do fashion trends dictate music trends? While there is some association between style and sound, how they intertwine and the various synergies between what one listens to and what one wears has not been fully dissected. This thesis explores popular music's relation to fashion and the corresponding effect that style has on mass society. In this attempt to discuss the relationship between music and fashion, key concepts in both popular music and fashion theory are used.

This thesis demonstrates that popular style is contingent upon a key music icon of that particular time period. By using a music icon as a case study with the methodology of semiotic content analysis, I show that style is in fact directly connected to popular music via the effects of the music icon in question. *People Magazine* in conjunction with television station VH1 published a special issue entitled "200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons" with a photo and description of each icon's accomplishments. Of the 200 chosen icons, forty-two were music stars. While this only encompasses twenty-one per cent of the total, the reason these music stars

attained an iconic status was due to their ability to carry off style along with their super talents. These self-created styles are now being marketed and produced in new forms as there is an increasing proliferation of the symbiosis between music, fashion and entertainment.

These three aspects of popular culture revolve around commodities that people actively seek and purchase. These commodities include recordings of music artists, clothing, fashion accessories and partaking in leisure activities such as concerts. With the popularity of these items, musicians, fashion designers and actors become newsworthy items and then sources of sponsorship for various commodity goods as the public relates to representations of these stars. While celebrity endorsements for commodities is a common practice, the nature of commodity has changed significantly in the last five years as more artists have taken stronger control of their commodity worth through their involvement in fashion. Karl Marx defined commodity by the diminishing respect for the value of goods in terms of their use-value, in terms of the real uses to which an item is to be put to use (1976:954). A commodity must acquire a two-fold mode of existence – its exchange-value must have a definite, independent, form distinct from its use value. Marx stated that the commodity-form has no connection with its physical nature and any material relations arising from it (1976:955). Rather, social relations between people define a commodity's value-relation, its price.

Social relations that emerge through consumptive practices is the essence of what Marx labeled commodity fetishism. What Marx was referring to was not the fetishization of particular commodities by individual consumers but rather a

displacement of the desire to know the actual production process of how the commodity is made (Osbourne, 2005:11). What becomes more integral is a desire to know, in this case the artist/celebrity. Therefore, this thesis is premised on the notion that consumers tend to fetishize music artist's fashion brands, in order to get a deeper sense of the artist. For example, on Oscar night what celebrities wear is as important as the films themselves. Oscar dresses have an exchange value based on the name value of the celebrity - Kiera Knightley wears a dress by Valentino. The dress is fetishized not because it is made by Valentino but because it is one step closer to understanding Kiera Knightley. There is a distinct separation here between commodity and artist. But when discussing music stars, more so the commodity is the artist as the music stars themselves have now become fashion designers. These commodities are successful based on how much one wants to connect to the artist.

Marx provided an insight into the complex nature of the commodity good but his ideas about capitalism were slightly flawed. For example, the tendency toward over accumulation can never be eliminated under capitalism is a Marxist argument. However, capitalism is not subject to overproduction as total supply and total demand always add up to the same amount, simply because they are the same thing just as consumption and production are dependent on one another (Heath and Potter, 2004:110-112). Thus, while it is important to acknowledge Marx's contributions and while some theory used is from post-Marxists such as Louis Althusser, and Frederic Jameson, this is because they have been key thinkers in the development of cultural studies and not proponents of Marx's ideas of capitalism. This thesis is rather a starting ground for instead using fashion theory (which has been largely under-used)

in the field of cultural studies as it can begin to provide an understanding of how consumption and production relate to one another.

Commodity fetishism is useful to interpret the real but superficial relationships that we can observe in the market place in appropriate social terms (Harvey, 1989:100). However, it is only a start. Marx's analysis of commodity production is outdated because capitalism is now predominantly concerned with the production of signs, images and sign systems rather than commodities themselves. In this thesis, I try and show how music artists which are understood initially as signs, transform their image into a physical commodity – that being fashion items. I would like to add that a commodity can also be a representation of an actual person so much so that the commodity in question cannot exist without a direct connection to something. This shift in popular culture is witnessed in the heavy involvement that music celebrities have currently with fashion labels – the artist becomes desired so much that they become fetishized through their own branded commodity good.

The intent of this thesis is to analyze how music a form of culture turned into commodity, relates to the purchase of fashion items, a commodity representing culture. From perfume to pants, lipstick to lingerie, shirts to skirts, we define ourselves through these objects, by *where* we purchase them (shopping malls, boutiques, thrift stores), to *how* we purchase them (Internet, credit card, on sale) and *why* we purchase them (to be in style, to rebel, to conform). Fashion is the element that allows us to combine class, gender, race and musical preference through consumption. As will be explained, these criteria define our personae and how we convey our identity to others around us. Using a combination of theories from

postmodernism and political economy is a way to understand our individual tendencies with fashion and music as we can no longer conceive of the individual as alienated because to be alienated presupposes a coherent self rather than a fragmented one (Harvey, 1989:53). As our culture is composed of fragments, our methods to analyze it need to adjust accordingly.

In order to show how commodity and culture have clashed together, an overview of existing literature regarding style and music needs to be examined. I propose that the six-step fashion cycle is integral in dissecting why certain events, items and people gain popularity. Following that, I show how music icon Britney Spears morphed into a brand and how her key traits became part of popular culture. Her contributions were the cause of this shift in brand as artist involvement and I suggest that a new mode of analysis regarding music artists needs to be employed, that being addressing the artist through consumptive practices. The first part of the thesis lays out the theoretical framework, followed by a semiotic content analysis of Britney Spears. From the results, a new term to explain this current popular culture trend of artist-as-commodity-as-brand is developed. As each chapter has different theoretical perspectives, an overview is provided as all of the chapters build toward a new meaning model.

In chapter two, I explain how music and fashion are co-dependent because both revolve around a cycle. While fashion theory has developed an official cycle tracing the way that fashion evolves and fades² a cycle regarding popular music while explored, has not been canonized into official steps. Rather, popular music studies have tended to dwell on the idea of subculture to find the meaning of style. While

Dick Hebdige's (1979) almost thirty-year-old coining of the term subculture still poses merit, the term has been misused and it is not a valid indicator in defining style. Subcultures dealt with marginalized groups who used their look as forms of protest to oppose dominant mainstream culture. However, such looks are no longer signs of protest, but signs of profits as marketing firms have commodified rebellion and resold angst in forms of designer ripped jeans and soda water. As bleak as this commodification sounds, the actual artifacts in the cycle change and people do find meaning in style. How that cycle evolves and changes is the root of understanding key aspects of cultural consumption.

Rather than use Theodor Adorno's (1972) culture industry argument where people are duped by mass media's viscious thrills and become seduced by the next big thing, in **chapter three** I use Fredric Jameson's 1993 analysis of postmodern society to narrow the culture/commerce gap. Beneath the veneer of the glitz of consumption lies a complex way in which people communicate through fashion. Understanding how the commodification of culture aids the consumer's fashion process needs to be explored rather than dismissed as "every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction" (Marx, 1976:711). Therefore commodification ultimately leads to more consumption and these reproductions are not only a valid method of expression but are, at times, the easiest way to communicate a said idea.

In such a heavy celebrity-induced culture, certain stars attain phenomenon-like status to become icons. Icons are stars who manage to convey the mood and overall sentiment of the time in popular culture through attitude and appearance. Icons

become a model of what people aspire to be or ultimately despise. Chadwick Roberts states that icons are a collection of diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings, as “icons shed light on that dense tangle of norms, values, and ideas that are collectively called culture” (2003:84). How people find meaning through icons is the basis of the next chapter.

Chapter four focuses on a major music icon in popular culture – Britney Spears. While one may detest the music or any of her contributions, the fact remains that she has proven herself worthy of analysis for the sheer amount of media coverage she receives. This is especially true regarding about what she wears as while her styles have become popular fashion (see chapter four), she was the worst dressed celebrity of 2006 according to the famous Mr.Blackwell’s list.³ Spears has been a media mainstay for the past five years as even in 2006 she was the most searched item according to Yahoo.com.⁴ While she tied for *Star Magazine*’s most annoying celebrity of 2004⁵, she was also the eighth-best-selling artist⁶ and *Rolling Stone Magazine* named “My Prerogative” best video.⁷ While this thesis could have focused on one aspect of Britney Spears, such as sexuality, what is far more relevant is how aspects of her persona such as sexuality, are used *to sell* fashion and create a signature style via brand identity.

To understand a music icon’s role in popular fashion, the primary methodology used was semiotic content analysis of magazines since this form of media combines advertising, popular culture, information and entertainment in a weekly or monthly format. Magazines provide a vehicle for discussion about popular culture and serve as a major showcase for fashion; content analysis can show style

shifts in the form of quantifiable data. Rather than analyze one particular genre of magazine, I examined teen, women's, men's, music and tabloid magazines to acquire a wide enough sample to determine how music/fashion relationships translate across supposedly different target demographics. Pictures of Spears were coded in magazines for over two years to determine her key looks. From these images, a series of style patterns emerged, which translated into a cultural matrix of what was deemed cool. These fashions now dictate prevailing cultural attitudes that last as long as the icon's popularity.

In **chapter five**, Britney Spears' key cultural contributions are discussed. Her styles have popularized three major elements in mass culture: the ongoing construct of the bad/good girl, the emergence of a porno-chic society and an increase in consumption altering the signature/brand relationship. Britney Spears becomes a general marker, a reference point of what is in fashion. Vernacular such as "too Britney" is easily understood by the public and becomes a common way of referring to a particular style. "Anti-Britney" also becomes a common expression, and in the popular press the construction of the bad girl and good girl emerges. Styles such as thong underwear, midriff t-shirts and low-rise jeans emerged that were considered naughty and risqué. Other stars opposed the look entirely. Work clothes, studded belts and cargo pants also soon became a cool staple. Christina Aguilera, Avril Lavigne, Hilary Duff, Jessica Simpson and a whole slew of other female artists benefited from this mini-war surrounding female fashion.

Due to the spectrum of sexuality in these styles, I will propose that the appropriation of pornographic aspects into mainstream culture proliferated. From

music video concepts to mainstream film topics to magazine covers to accepted public outerwear, pornographic tendencies crept in and pushed the limits of society's status quo. Topless models in men's magazine, censored music videos and visible thong underwear showing out of pants are now common aspects in popular culture. While Britney Spears cannot be pinpointed as the cause of these shifts, her looks and behaviour make shifts such as these tolerable and accepted. This thesis in no way tries to condemn or condone these occurrences; Spears' contribution to the rise of consumer culture is far more important than the ongoing debate of the effects of highly sexualized images that proves to be tired and moot.

What is of far more significance now is that the music star has developed into a brand identity rather than being merely a celebrity. While areas of popular culture such as film and television revolve around a star system, music holds a unique relationship with fashion. Music stars have the ability to attain a cultural phenomena status that can set a mood and dictate the fashion agenda of a nation. From the Beatles' mop-tops to Elvis' jumpsuits to Jennifer Lopez's tracksuits, there is a reason why these images resonate into the popular styles of the time.

Chapter six explores the nature of music stars and brands further by establishing three distinct processes of the involvement of a music star into brand. I will introduce the terms "signastar," "signasponsor," and "signabrand." The signastar is the more traditional relationship of direct sponsorship between artist and brand. For example, a brand will endorse a tour or provide complimentary clothing for an artist's performances. A signasponsor occurs when an artist begins to wear a brand so frequently that an indirect relationship between the artist and brand is formed.

Although there is no formal association, the brand represents the artist's lifestyle and popularity of the brand emerges thanks to the artist. A new development is the signabrand, where the signature and brand become merged into one. The artist now becomes the brand in question. Many popular artists are now considered fashion designers because they have their own clothing lines that consist not of token souvenir items, but of high-style markers.

Celebrity endorsements are not a new phenomenon in any field. What is new is the music star as a designer, or perceived as being the designer, rather than simply an endorser of a clothing line. The issue of branding is a hot topic as popular culture has witnessed a massive shift in how commodity goods, especially fashion items, are marketed into a "continuous intensification of shopping" (Zurkin, 2004:257). While brands such as Calvin Klein have been popular since the early eighties, there has been a vast increase in the knowledge of designer clothing, specifically amongst youth culture; so much so that music stars have delved into designing their own looks with startling success. Strong brands can be successfully extended into seemingly incongruent product categories provided that consumers are motivated and able to identify a meaningful commonality between the products (Maoz and Trybout, 2002:130). In order to be cool a *real* music fan does not just listen to the music but must understand the codes and conventions behind the music. In this case, consumers who are knowledgeable or believe themselves to be knowledgeable about music must acquire additional cultural capital since they are now asked to identify such commonalties spontaneously and respect the music artist as a designer as well.

It was believed that style and fashion provided an expressive form to release the tensions between those in power and those in subordinated positions (Marchart: 2003: 86). In order to neutralize the effects of subordinated groups, a strategy is to increase incorporation through commodification (Staiger, 2005:85). With the combination of music star as fashion designer fully blossoming in 2004, such tensions have changed the notion of fashion as an expressive form. I would also like to consider fashion as a response to one's own class struggle through the representation of the supposed class status that an artist portrays. The music artist now provides class categories through their brands that people can identify with.

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt state how within the postmodern era authors have assumed to subordinate economics to culture (1994:114). This subordination is a result of tight stratifications of occupation and class being eroded. Social distinction has now been broadly conferred by possessions and appearances as consumption/consumerism is a major distinguishing and constitutive feature of the culture of late capitalism (Eagleton, 2000:72-73). Within this framework, cultural intermediaries appear that link modes of production to consumption, such as with music stars becoming fashion designers. P. Diddy's successful clothing line Sean John is the cultural intermediary between designer and musician. However, Keith Negus believes that cultural intermediaries reproduce rather than bridge the distance between production and consumption, as increasing use of publicity, public relations, marketing, and other symbolic intermediary activity has not necessarily resulted in production and consumption being brought closer together (2002:502). Instead, it has exaggerated the space between the product (or performer) and the public. Finding

how the music artist/designer negotiates this space is a further theoretical challenge to be addressed in this thesis.

Terry Eagleton, in the end of his book *The Idea of Culture*, states that while one has to acknowledge culture's significance, it is time to put it back in its place (2000:131). Therefore, one needs to understand the relationship between consumption and culture to complete the "circuit of culture" where production and consumption sites are understood through intermediary functions - such as advertising, magazines, music video and websites (Harrington and Bielby, 2001:11). Todd Gitlin suggests that we begin to take the media seriously "not as a cornucopia of wondrous gadgets or a collection of social problems, but as a central condition of an entire way of life" (2001:210). This thesis is a starting point in understanding how the media creates icons that generate the fuel for consumption of style and why we feel the need for it.

While much attention is devoted to Britney Spears, any music cultural icon can be used with the framework provided. The point here is to show how a music star's image is represented by mass media and how it triggers a series of cultural discourses. These discourses will vary according to the music star in question (as much as the culture industry believes it all to be the same), but as will be demonstrated throughout what does not change is the sequence of events that cause one to attain this type of status.

In **chapter seven**, having seen how the fashion cycle can be applied to popular music, how consumers transfer meaning from signabrands - icons involved in music and fashion - I expand on Grant McCracken's (2005) meaning movement and

endorsement process. I provide additional steps to his model to demonstrate how the artist has evolved into a commodity. To understand the new model, one has to acknowledge that the music artist can become a brand due the exchange value they possess. Once they are a brand, abstract labour through music video, posters and retail outlets provide images and then commodity goods to the consumer so that they can have outlets to fetishize the artist. A new meaning model was developed in hope that it could be applied to a current music icon or one a decade from now when a new style – either ugly right now, or not yet developed or not yet properly bricolaged – bears fruit, becomes all the rage, before the imminent backlash begins all over again.

What such research commands is to take fashion seriously and recognize the cultural implications behind consumption. Fashion and style play critical roles in all forms of mass media, as dress and appearance have become markers of how people are judged and classified. By understanding how popular culture and popular music specifically aids the fashion process, we can find meaning and value in our purchases.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

¹ Luckily my mother was a recipient of this card. She likes neither Britney nor Madonna but loves shopping. She also enjoys Outkast's "Hey Ya."

² Joel Best (2006) has recently identified three major stages in any fad cycle – emerging, surging and purging which stems from the fashion cycle discussed in chapter two.

³ <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10790857/>

⁴ <http://entertainment.tv.yahoo.com/entnews/ap/20051215/113470254000.html>

⁵ Star Magazine, Dec 27, 2004 pg.64. Britney Spears tied with Paris Hilton for most annoying person of 2004.

⁶ Source: People Magazine 2004 – Year-end edition.

⁷ <http://www.rollingstone.com/bestvideos04?rnd=1103743716625&has-player=true&version=6.0.12.1040>

Chapter Two – The Perfect Fit: Popular Music as Popular Fashion

Fashion and music have typically been studied independently of each other, yet both music revolve around style and thus form a complex relationship. Paul Nystrom defines fashion as “nothing more than the prevailing style at any given time — whether a style is followed or accepted, it is the fashion” (1928:4). Ruth Rubinstein states that fashion is “a visual image that tells a story about the important ideas, events, developments and core tensions of a given period” (1995:241). Style is defined as “a characteristic or distinctive mode or method of expression, presentation or conception in the field of some art” (Nystrom, 1928: 3). I will argue that music as an art form adopts a popular style and the clothing considered in fashion is thus dependent on the musical trends of the time as popular music stars use their music to suggest a look. Lipovetsky emphasizes this relationship between music and fashion writing that stars “are not only foyers of fashion, they are even more figures of fashion in themselves as beings-for seduction,” (1994:182).

Style is a wonderfully expressive medium capable of representing complex attitudes and values, as it is a combination of personal expression and social norms influenced by dominant values (Polhemus, 1994:15). The construction of a style involves the appropriation of existing clothes, commodities, languages, images, sounds and behavioural codes (Negus, 1996:17). Music, more than any other form of media culture provides access to these codes, as music video, performance and the music star system all add to the construction of style: as John Tinker states “it (music) is the essential element of language that shapes subjectivity and subcultures”(2003:87).¹

The relationship between music and clothing, particularly in youth culture, is as previously stated, complex as clothing has been traditionally considered a non-verbal visual form of communication and music an auditory medium. While music does have political and ideological constructs embedded in the auditory medium, the representation of music as a form of visual culture is largely achieved via music video. This music video gains authority by the degree of correspondence between music and image at any given moment, and the way in which this moment stands in relation to the video as a whole (Vernallis, 2004:180). In most music videos, a song is represented through the artist's performance or through a narrative enactment of some sort involving actors, dancers, musicians and fans. An important ingredient of the visual image is the clothing worn by the performers. With the popularity of music video, fashion becomes an integral component, as this is where viewers can quickly identify the artist's style and look.

Up until the early 1990s, the fashion industry did not fully consider the role of popular music in trends and styles but in the last decade, supermodels have taken a back seat to music superstars (Hay, 2003:1). Pop music stars such as Gwen Stefani, Christina Aguilera, Eve, Beyonce and Shania Twain have all graced covers of fashion magazines and US *Vogue* had only one non-celebrity cover this past 2004. As Lisa Armstrong of UK *Vogue* states, "today's pop stars know that if they want to be big all over the planet, fashion is an international message that can get their message across" (2003:259). In the ever-tightening nexus between fashion and music, having the right artist wearing the right clothes is profitable for the clothing maker as well as the artist (Hall and Poalotta, 2003:9). Many market research firms that analyze youth culture

acknowledge that music and fashion are highly inter-connected.² *Billboard*, a music industry magazine, now reports on fashion on a regular basis and obtains quotes from stylists and marketers about this evolution. Some examples include:

"Music is a big part of our consumers' lifestyles," says Dari Marder, creative director of Candie's, whose recent shoe campaigns have included "American Idol" first-season winner (Kelly) Clarkson, Ashanti, Kelly Osbourne and Destiny's Child (Hay, 2003:1).

"Music and fashion have become so intertwined that it's a natural fit ... Fashion is such a major component to artists and their lifestyles," adds Jon Cohen, co-founder of Cornerstone, a marketing and promotion company (Poalotta, 2003:9).

"After the music, the 'look' is next...Now, more than ever, artists are transcending music with fashion," *Fader* magazine fashion coordinator/stylist Lee Randolph says (Hall, 2003:31).

Fashion magazines likewise report on music and its dominating presence in determining style. *Elm Street The Look* (Winter 2004) ran a feature article on how music video director Jake Nava mixes fashion and music when working with pop divas such as Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears and Beyonce. *Harper's Bazaar* (June 2000) printed a story on the narrowing generation gap between mothers and daughters with the "advent of Buffy-Britney-Brandy youth glamour" (Sales, 2000: 178). Accompanying the article was a photo of Limp Bizkit's Fred Durst chatting with a mother and daughter. While an assumption is made that popular music as a phenomenon is almost associated with youth, David Hesmondhalgh notes that this is quite problematic as musical experiences of other people has been marginalized (2002:118). Just as fashion is no longer solely for grown-ups, music is not solely the domain of teenagers as there is now a general acceptance of consuming style that transcends the generation gap.

As music sales have declined,³ the money now saved via the accumulation of CD burners, downloading and/or file sharing goes towards purchasing the styles seen in music video, magazines, and media artifacts. Fashion has capitalized on this change in music technology as musical preference increasingly corresponds to appearance as seen in the rise of niche specialty clothing companies such as Diesel, Triple Five Soul, French Connection FCUK, Energie, Juicy Couture and Ben Sherman who incorporate aspects of music's visual culture to showcase their wares.⁴ Such clothing companies have realized that clothing and fashion, as modes of communication, are cultural phenomena in that culture itself may be understood as a signifying system, as the ways in which a society's beliefs, values, ideas and experiences are communicated through practices, artifacts and institutions (Barnard, 2002:38). They have also realized the contribution of popular music in understanding the entire signifying system.

Joanne Entwistle states "the clothes we choose to wear represent a compromise between the demands of the social world, the milieu in which we belong, and our own individual desires" (2000:14). Clothing allows personal expression, but only to a certain degree as defined by one's social parameters. Social norms, individual expression and technology influence how this choice is exercised (Lurie 1981:4). What one chooses to listen to is also based on the above three factors since popular music and fashion function in a cyclical pattern. Certain genres of music become popular and are then washed away into oblivion, such as disco or grunge. An artist such as MC Hammer may be a chart-topper one-year and then later file for bankruptcy. A style such as acid-wash jeans may be all the rage one season, only to

be replaced by another style. Although these cycles do not have precise life spans, there are reasons as to why they do in fact shift. The discourse of popular music and fashion are rarely discussed simultaneously, but both are premised on non-rationality, since a capitalist society must be able to generate the continual flow of new products 'necessary to keep the industry functioning (Stratton, 1983:294). Popular music should be treated as a form of fashion, as fashion theory can be useful in analyzing how music trends develop.

The Cyclical Nature of Music and Fashion: Wear, Rattle and Roll

Fred Davis defines the fashion cycle

as the phased elapsed time from the introduction of a fashion to its supplantation by a successive fashion. The process refers to the complex of influences, interactions, exchanges, adjustments and accommodations among persons, organizations and institutions that animates the cycle from its inception to its demise (1989:103).

The fashion cycle is merely the popular acceptance of the rise, culmination and decline of a style and, I would argue may equally applied to clothing or music. Georg Simmel coined this idea nearly 100 years ago when he stated, "the distinctiveness which in the early stages of a set fashion assures for it a certain distribution is destroyed as the fashion spreads, and as this elements wanes, the fashion is also bound to die" (1981:9). Since fashion is the widespread adoption by imitation of a style, what is in fashion at any time can be determined by physical count — what is selling and how many people have it —and need not at all be a matter of opinion (Nystrom, 1928:18). In the same way, we can determine what music is in fashion by perusing through pop music charts. In both cases, just because a song

or clothing style becomes popular does not mean that everybody agrees to like it, but rather it becomes negotiated as the general flavour of the month.

There is widespread agreement that the pace of the fashion cycle has greatly accelerated. It has become a “natural” part of popular culture most especially since the Second World War, which directly corresponds to the birth of rock and roll (Davis, 1989:105). The rise of popular rock and roll music came in the mid-50s when teenage affluence was rising. Even in 1965, the estimate of disposable income that teens possessed in America was \$14 billion (Smith, 1965:10). The baby boomer generation now has a very loyal attachment to the popular music of their youth, as they have a clearer generational identity than any other generation has had, they refuse to let go of childhood and youth, and the mass media, especially in their marketing and advertising functions encourage such behaviours (Burns, 1996:129). Baby boomers’ disposable income results in Paul McCartney and the Rolling Stones topping the income-earning chart in 2002. The top 16 earners in 2002 also included Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, the Eagles, Elton John, and Bruce Springsteen.⁵

The economic force of baby boomers on the music industry has carried on to their children. According to Elisa Moses whose firm conducted The New World Teen Study, which interviewed 30 000 teenagers between 15-19, teens' total disposable income is now close to \$200 billion⁶ (2000:199), and *New York* magazine has dubbed this obsession with money the “The Teenage Economy” (Amsden, 2005:18). Moses' survey shows that the primary activity that youths enjoy is listening to music: ninety one percent of teens listen to music and the number one reason they go online is music. Music offers a domain in which, during adolescence, people begin

to explore (and develop) their tastes and skills as consumers, and musical commodities are among the first things that young people buy for themselves (Straw, 1999:65). As Peter G. Christenson states

it is the medium [music] that matters most to adolescents, not least because it talks about the things that matter most to them – love, sex, loyalty, independence, friendship, authority – with an honesty and directness they don't often get from adults...popular music functions as the essential equipment for living (2003: 119).

These music purchases begin to define their lifestyle and form the basis for other purchases, especially clothing. The fashion cycle corresponds to changes in both music and clothing and according to Georg Simmel, becomes influenced by “the dullness of nervous impulses. The more nervous the age, the more rapidly its fashion change, simply because the desire for differentiation, one of the most important elements of all fashion, goes hand in hand with the weakening of nervous energy” (1908:9). As consumers seek something new, they also want to be part of the pack. Very few are early-adopters who breakaway from the pack and begin to wear and listen to things that have not been popularized. Music style bibles such as pitchforkmedia.com and glossy alternative fashion magazines such as *I-D* write about new forms of culture and set this early-adopter trend. This early-adopter trend moves so rapidly that every month something is the next big thing, thus hyper-inducing the mainstream with more and more products. A consumer-fear is then self-induced as if you are not part of the trend, you are not part of culture. By the time Ugg Boots and Clap Your Hands Say Yeah have entered mall retailers, the early-adopters have moved on to far more obscure items and the general public feel they are in the know.

This quest for being different through such commodity purchases is an easy way to show others of where you stand in the fashion cycle.

Variable and sub-cycles then take effect without logical sequence but must follow some sort of societal order; while there is no definite reason why a certain style comes into fashion, it must appeal somehow to a majority of individuals as “human beings do not wish to be modest; they want to be as expressive – that is, as immodest – as fear allows; fashion helps them solve their paradoxical problem” (Sapir, 1981: 26). The cycle never ends as once the coveted handbag, shoe or compact disc is acquired, it only lasts in style for so long. How long popular fashions stay hip is, as I am demonstrating, related to the popular music trends of the time. Thorstein Veblen based his *Theory of the Leisure Class* on the notion that “dress must not only be conspicuously expensive and inconvenient; it must at the same time be up to date. No explanation at all satisfactory has hitherto been offered of the phenomenon of changing fashions” (1981:18). Over one hundred years later one can find the explanation that Veblen was seeking: music is the major factor in the changing of fashion. Rather than adopting the fashion cycle to music and clothing trends, this relationship has primarily been analyzed from the perspective of “subculture.” Dick Hebdige (1979) used this idea to determine the meaning of style, rather than using existing fashion theories such as Simmel’s (1908) trickle-down theory.

McCracken interprets trickle-down theory as “subordinate social groups, following the principle of imitation, seek to establish new status claims by adopting the clothing of superordinate group” (1985:39). The elite or upper classes embrace a style, become bored with it and adopt a new one while the lower classes revel in the

discarded style. Hebdige merely reversed this process by showing how style trickles up, rather than trickles down and attributed the reason for these style shifts to subculture. Fashion allegiances can therefore be understood as kind of a social cement (Briggs and Cobley, 1999:342). They provide a means for binding individuals into collectivities while simultaneously excluding others; the same applies to music preferences. While the idea of subculture is still commonly used to explain the relationship between style, music and fashion, there are various flaws in subculture theory that cannot account for how style works in relation to music and fashion. One of these flaws is relying on structural homology where one links values of social groups to their preferred music (Martin 2004:31). While there is a connection, solely relying on these two factors exaggerates the coherence of both and does not account for other factors such as participation in social life and mass media. It is all too easy to pinpoint new looks as being subcultural when in fact fashion theory – largely ignored in relation to popular music even though both are dependent on cycles – postmodernism and political economy all play as factors as well.

Subculture Debunked: No Search for Cool Here

Subcultures define themselves against the dominant culture, as their ideological location is established in opposition to prevailing cultural practices or values (Leonard, 1997:247). Subcultures are manifestations of self-expression, individual autonomy and cultural diversity, and have increasingly come to define the experiences of sections of post-war working and lower-middle-class youth (Muggleton, 2000:167) as demonstrated in classic books on subcultures, such as Hall

and Jefferson's *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), and Dick Hebdige's *Subcultures* (1979). The origins of subculture emerged from the Chicago School on the premise that subcultures provide the key to an understanding of deviance as normal behaviour in social circumstances (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004:5). The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham had a political agenda to uncovering forms of rebellion through style: the extent of subcultural participation in economic processes was neglected in the seventies (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003:8). Theorists at the time believed that to understand the ideology behind a subculture was to understand the subculture's music preference (Epstein, 2000:16). However, subcultures are irrelevant when looking for meaning in style solely through music and clothing preferences, as many genres of music appear on *Billboard* charts and are much too blurred — various groups could enjoy the same hip-hop song. While subcultures began as a theoretical approach to fragmented cultures and everyday social practices, they are now a foundation for commercial understandings of youth culture as a matter of markets, brands, fashion, consumption and advertising (Frith, 2004:177).

Whereas initial subcultures developed from the streets, the concept of the street has now changed, as shopping malls have become the dominant cultural playground for youth culture. The streets once allowed those who opposed authority to rebel. While Susan Willis believes that class is the single most important factor in the definition of subculture (1993:367), the development of teen consumer culture and rapid suburbanization in fact makes class far less important, as there is in contemporary U.S. society a smaller working-class and larger middle-class. For Sarah

Thornton (1995), class is not relevant with the taste cultures she studied, as subcultural capital is only a form of representation and cultural knowledge (Lincoln, 2004:97). It is then almost impossible to distinguish between a subculture's members and its would-be followers, as the turn around cycle from underground to mainstream is so rapid and vapid that any form of authenticity becomes very short-lived. The idea of subculture is outdated, as why groups hang out cannot be determined solely by political leanings or by musical preference; the reasons are far too complex.

Teenagers think they are resisting some form of dominant culture by adopting a particular music or lifestyle, but they are in effect sustaining the commercial viability of the commodification of teen spirit (Brooks, 2003:5). Resistance became commodified as subcultures were co-opted by market forces for their fashion potential (Hebdige, 1979:94-96). Authenticity and subcultural identity which is symbolized in street style is lost when it becomes the latest fashion and can be purchased without reference to its original subcultural meaning. (Polhemus, 1994:12). As Heath and Potter point out, rebellion, not conformity, has been the driving force of the marketplace as counterculture rebellion is a contributing factor to intensified consumerism (2004:86). Rebellion is the system that provides one of the most powerful sources of distinction in the modern world and such mass-marketing or "co-optation" is, and always has been for good business (2004:175). Nothing is truly subcultural anymore as cool-hunters — agents employed by research and marketing firms — seek what is novel and then present these styles as different (Lopiano-Misdom&Deluca, 1997).⁷ They market new products as "hip" in niche stores and various pseudo-alternative outlets, such as music video stations or in video games, in

order to make trend seekers believe they are ahead in style. After a period of time, the item becomes highly coveted and popular, ensuring the cool hunt once again. Subcultural theorists ignored the act of buying because shopping was seen as a feminine activity. Indeed the idea that styles could be bought in “mainstream” commercial outlets contradicted the notion that subcultures produced their shocking styles in “an act of creative defiance.” (McRobbie, 2000:24).

Once a style of popular music, such as grunge or techno, becomes assimilated into the mainstream, it fades away into oblivion, as the appeal is soon lost. It becomes commercially accepted and loses the new edge it once had. A new form of music, such as emo will develop a base of listeners seeking an alternative outlet from mass mainstream music to counter the previous trend. Fans become disappointed that “their” original subculture became commodified. While it was believed that every subculture uses dress and body decoration to signal what it considers are the most important and most desirable characteristics of its wearer (Polhemus, 1994:7), one must consider if this is merely the fashion cycle at work. When a subculture such as punk is adopted by the mainstream, subcultures are brought back into line, their meaning changed and “incorporated” within the consensus (Clarke, 1989: 91).

Sarah Thornton (1995) states that subcultures are best defined as social groups that have been labeled as such. As long as one is not entirely in the mainstream, one is perceived to be in a subculture. However, the mainstream is so diverse, so ever-changing, that there are of course, groups who are listen to something other than the top forty. And even if they do listen to the top of the charts, there is so much diversity that they could listen to a variety of genres. What made subcultures notable is not

their obvious bricolage — putting together different items and images to create an original costume that is meaningful to the individual (Crane, 2000:190) — but the lack of any fashion confusion as a style becomes a "uniform" (Clarke, 1989:92). This uniform becomes sought-after by members of society up until a saturation point is reached that opposes what was in fashion. As vehicles of subcultural capital, subcultures simply mark distinctions, assert hierarchy, claim exclusivity and transfer differentiating mechanisms of bourgeois society in youth culture itself (Middleton, 2001:215), all which are characteristics of the traditional fashion cycle model. The six-stage fashion cycle, developed by George Sproles (1981), consists of:

1. ***Invention*** – A style is invented, or reintroduced with a new element. (Example: denim blue jeans that are low-rise or highly distressed.)
2. ***Introduction*** – A style is introduced to the mass public via fashion runways, fashion magazines and various forms of mass media. (Example: Joan Rivers commenting on what celebrities are wearing on the red carpet.)
3. ***Fashion leadership*** – A style becomes accepted by a person (or a group) in the mass media who is known for their style influence and passion for fashion. The person begins to adopt the new style, making it part of their signature look. (Example: Madonna starts wearing Gap tank-tops after appearing in a Gap commercial with rap star Missy Elliot. Madonna being the spokesperson for Versace).
4. ***Increasing social visibility*** – The new look then becomes popular amongst trendseekers who want to be on the cutting edge of fashion. Magazines start to write about the look in various "what's hot" sections and the items become

newsworthy. (Example: A velour tracksuit made by Juicy Couture becomes the rage.)

5. *Conformity within and across social groups* – The look is accepted as in style and is highly desired. It begins to become less exclusive and can now be much more easily obtained. (Example: Females wearing a tie with casual wear.)
6. *Social saturation* – The item now enters the mainstream, where many retailers who want to cash in on the style produce knock-off looks. The original look and the mass-reproduced look become so similar that only the fashion conscientious can distinguish between them. Eventually, the style becomes passe when the fashion leaders have moved on to another look. (Example: The brown-print Louis Vuitton handbag or plaid Burberry scarf being widely replicated as fakes.)

This six-stage cycle demonstrates how subculture is merely a natural process in the evolution of fashion trends by examining music. Rather than placing emphasis on subcultures, which is what popular music studies tends to do, examining the concept of the fashion cycle in relation to popular music opens up many avenues of analysis.

Following Hebdige's example of 1970s punk in Britain, one can witness the validity of the cycle. Punk in working-class Britain emerged out of youth dissatisfaction with their state in society, and it introduced a different mode of appearance as a response to these conditions. Fashion leadership consisted of visionaries such as Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, who brought punk fashions into the limelight. Social visibility came with the growing number of punk bands, particularly the emergence of the Sex Pistols and the antics of Sid Vicious creating news headlines. Conformity set in when the punk look became less novel and

was adopted by a vast number of people, leading to social saturation. Suddenly, wearing a large Union Jack on the back of a leather jacket, Doc Marten shoes and spiked hair was not anti-authority, but a popular look. This, then, resulted in the decline of punk and the emergence of a new music trend, disco, which led to new fashion styles. Most of the political meanings were also washed away. As Christopher Breward notes

in a more consumerist sense, the democratic, unmediated ethic of Punk opened up a scenario at once utopian and troubling, in which an explicit self-expression through dress and music has become the unquestioned norm, almost a civil rights issue amongst the young, while those universal injustices relating to gender, race or sexuality which Punk had promised to undermine continue to thrive unchecked in the very music and fashion-based industries which have grown up in Punk's wake (2003:227).

This type of cycle can be applied not only to punk, but also to any type of music and fashion combination. While there is no specific life-span allocated to each step, it does evolve and still follows the overall pattern of the six-stage fashion cycle: the grunge look of 1993 was very different than the 2000 midriff/bubblegum look (t-shirts exposing the navel, dyed hair and low-rise tight jeans). The grunge scene, or "Seattle sound," emerged around 1991 amid a recession and relatively bleak economic prospects. The sound combined punk, heavy metal and rock with a nonchalant attitude of not caring about one's appearance. Signature looks were scruffy beards, ripped jeans and flannel (Epstein, 1998:19). This style was introduced to mainstream audiences through Kurt Cobain of the band Nirvana, who became the poster boy for grunge (Howe and Strauss, 1993). As soon as Nirvana gained some popularity, other Seattle bands such as Soundgarden and Pearl Jam also began to acquire success. Clothing conformity came across when fashion designer Marc Jacobs

introduced these looks as high-end fashion on runways, only to be fired by Perry Ellis, the company he was working for.⁸ Social saturation arrived when all one could hear on radio stations was alternative-based programming and sponsors trying to capitalize on this Generation X target because the early 1990s “were a time in which generational identity was a hot commodity precisely because resistance to it discouraged communal affective investments in popular culture” (Curnutt, 2003:180). André Leon Talley, *Vogue's* editor-at-large, predicted that grunge would mean the end of fashion (*Economist*, 2004:12). The boom, bust and echo of alternative rock died at the birth of bubblegum with pop stars such as the Spice Girls and Britney Spears. As boy-bands and girl-groups’ popularity waned, teen fashions in 2002-4 have slowly returned to the alternative styles of the early 1990s: popular bands that have this updated style include the Strokes, the Vines and the White Stripes.

Ted Polhemus states that, “for the best part of human history, the chosen message has been ‘I am rich’ or ‘I am powerful’. Today, increasing numbers of people are using their dress style to assert ‘I am authentic’” (1994:7). This authenticity was contingent upon the supposed subculture that one belonged to. However, the look or item which was considered subcultural in style is now what David Muggleton calls post-subculturalist as it is harder to determine ‘subcultural authenticity’ (2000:47). As Dylan Clark notes, “the value of subcultural signs and meanings has been depleted” (2003:228). Following Baudrillard’s logic, subcultural styles have become simulacra (see next section), copies with no originals (Muggleton, 2000:46).

Postmodern theorists from Frederic Jameson to Jean Baudrillard see the elusiveness of authenticity as the fundamental crisis of our age (Polhemus, 1994:7). This crisis is why the idea of subculture still exists, as this is still thought of as an original authentic source. However, no subculture is completely authentic, as intricate modes of commercialization have crept into every possible subculture, music and fashion genre.⁹ Tom Frank provides such examples as the “anti-establishment Pepsi Generation, cavorting to what sounds like ‘grunge rock,’ ...the Gap enlisting members of Sonic Youth to demonstrate their products’ continuing street-cred ... the makers of Guess preferring imagery of an idealized ‘alternative’ band, played by models” (1995:97). Bricolage seen as reinvested ready-made objects with new meanings is now buycolage, as a series of brands each profess their mark of individuality. While small groups of people, or what Michel Maffesoli (1996) calls “tribes,” may be responsible for coming up with a new style, what becomes trendy emerges everywhere at roughly the same time, so the style is more dependent on its stage in the cycle than the look itself.

For a subculture to truly exist, it must display elements of rebellion, affiliation and transcendence (Andes, 1999:226). Rebellion consists of opposition to dominant mainstream culture by resisting traditional norms, notably through appearance and/or behaviour. Behind the look is a series of actions and general criteria that one engages in. The stage at which something becomes mainstream is affiliation. This stage is where the primary set of focal concerns and the private code of slang become public. The individuals who were true to that specific culture, and not simply posers, are the minority of youth who reach transcendence. Transcendence is where the ideologies of

the subculture outweigh the appearance attributes and become a dedicated lifestyle choice such as straight-edge (where alcohol, drugs and sex are forbidden) or veganism (a diet that consists of no animal products). Most of those who actually follow a subculture therefore care less about any political and ideological meaning than about what is in (or, rather, not in) mainstream fashion or about being one step ahead of the current trends. Subsequent studies carried out in Britain, America, Canada and Australia using interviews and participant observation have, in fact, found subculture belief systems to be complex and uneven (Muggleton, 2000:126). The key looks that are characteristic to a subculture tend to become so exploited that all subversive meaning becomes lost (Willis 1993:379).

The idea of subculture is outdated or, as Andy Bennet states, deeply problematic, “in that it imposes rigid lines of division over forms of association which may, in effect, be rather more fleeting, and in many cases arbitrary, than the concept of subculture, with its connotations of coherency and solidarity allows for” (1999:603). In late capitalism, Hebdige’s search for subcultural style now happens on a much wider, ‘mainstream’ scale. In a two-way process, authentic stylistic resistance occurs through various forms of bricolage, an act of transformation by which a new and original style is formed through plunder and recontextualization as a challenge to dominant culture (Muggleton, 2000:131). Then the style is rapidly incorporated through media and commercial exploitation, only for the cycle to emerge again. Aspects of the cycle change as certain music stars emerge. The premise that new cool-seekers are looking for new styles to adopt has nothing to do with subculture, but

rather with boredom, as clothing is one of the last spaces of free expression for youth and adults.

While Flugel maintains that the clothes a stranger wears tells something of their sex, occupation, nationality, and social standing (1950:15), what is the missing ingredient (as this statement was written nearly fifty years ago), is musical preference as subculture tried to explain. However, music and fashion cycles are not stagnant; they are ever-evolving, always in a constant state of flux, since the paradox of fashion is “that everyone is trying at the same time to be like, and to be unlike everybody else” (Flugel, 1950, 140). Rather than analyzing rebellion through forms of clothing, it is now more relevant to address how rebellion becomes expressed in music video through music stars, as this is a key vehicle to showcasing new styles. While one still needs to refer to the idea of subculture, the postmodern condition, along with cultural-political economy provides a much more contemporary approach.

Subculture tries to explain this relationship between music and fashion, as both have ideological implications, and thus notions, about sexuality, gender and class. But subculture is a small notion, as elements of youth culture such as music, dancing and purchasing clothing are not enjoyed exclusively by the fully paid-up members of that subculture (Clarke, 1989:83). One does not have to be a member of a subculture to be in style or to seek new styles when they feel saturated by a larger group. Since most people desire to be part of a collective group, when a style eventually changes, how one responds to stage three – fashion leadership – is far more important in determining style preference because one is then faced with the choice of either adopting, initiating or ignoring a style change. What decision is made can be

attributed to how popular culture aids in this shift. This switch happens when a new popular form of music emerges, and with it a star that carries the music's persona.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

¹ Subculture, a popular cultural studies term to understand underground, alternative, non-mainstream music in relation to style and how the term has become tired is explained in the latter part of this chapter.

² Youth marketing firm LookLook! in their December 2003 Hotsheet predicted that rap artist 50 Cent would be a profitable product endorser and Paris Hilton would rise to the top with the popularity of porno-chic (see chapter five). Included is an excerpt:

The latest rapper to venture into the fashion biz is 50 Cent. His line of shoes (made by Reebok) and clothing is called G Unit. Urban/hip hop-inspired clothing like FUBU, Enyce, Rocawear, Phat Farm (especially Baby Phat) and throwback jerseys all rate high with young shoppers. Meanwhile, teen Good Charlotte fans continue to shop at Hot Topic. Favorite brands include Tripp NYC (for bondage pants and twill trench coats), Converse Chucks, and Morbid MakeUp.

Such companies perform research about teen trends. They then sell this research to marketers and companies who are interested in what is trendy amongst this demographic. How the role of popular music plays in the lives of teenagers is of utmost importance to such firms as music is a marker of what is cool and hip.

³ According to the RIAA (2002), the number of CD's shipped in the U.S. fell from 940 million to 800 million--or 15%--between 2000 and 2002. The record industry has claimed this decline is due to file sharing. However in "The Effect of File Sharing on Record Sales An Empirical Analysis" by Felix Oberholzer and Koleman Strumpf suggest otherwise (www.unc.edu/~cigar/papers/FileSharing_March2004.pdf -). They conclude that there is little relation to file sharing and music sales.

⁴ Clothing firms such as those mentioned tend to incorporate music references and imagery in their advertising campaigns.

⁵ <http://www.slate.com/id/2118607/>

⁶ According to Teenage Research Unlimited, teen spending was \$175 billion in 2003 with teens spending an average of \$103 per week.

⁷ Cool-hunting has emerged as a dominant form of research for marketers who need to discover the latest trends. Companies pay upwards of \$20 000 to get a hold of what trendsetters are doing. MTV networks does its own ethnographic research interviewing teens and going to their houses and seeing how they incorporate popular culture into their lives. Cool-hunting emerged in the late 1990s when popular music was used with commercial tie-ins and product placement in youth brands. Now, marketing to teens and using new forms of popular music with a product have become the norm.

⁸ <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/02/06/opinion/rmarc.php>

⁹ This thesis is not the place for a larger discussion of the contested notion of authenticity as my research is primarily about the mainstream and how such ideas as authenticity prey upon consumer culture.

Chapter Three – Thought That Rock Guitar Could Save My Generation (Turns Out Postmodernism Did): Culture and Commodification in Music Video and Clothing

While the idea of subculture rose to prominence through rebellion, style and music, it has blossomed into hybrid forms through political economy and postmodern forces at work. Cultural political economy emphasizes lifeworld aspects of economic processes – identities, discourses, work cultures and the social and cultural embedding of economic activity, reversing the pattern of conventional political economy with its concern for systems (Sayer, 2001:688). This process results in the purchase of cultural goods to express an individual's cultural capital. Increasingly, clothing purchases are based on subcultural history that is sold in "packages," via descriptions such as punk, goth and rave. While the items purchased may have nothing to do with the subculture at hand, *the process of the purchase* is as equally as important as the authenticity behind it. Postmodernism and political economy can provide a framework for how music and fashion correspond as long as the mainstream is taken seriously. As Clint Burnham states

while we are all in the masses today, this is objectively a characteristic of postmodern or multinational or late capitalism, and that means our interpellation as consumers of mass culture is a serious one – hence the need to abandon high-cultural apparatuses for the interpretation of the popular (1995: 203).

While postmodernity shares a view of discourse as problematic and of ordering systems as suspect, postmodernism is the name given to cultural practices that acknowledge participation in capitalism without giving up the power or will to intervene critically in it (Hutcheson, 2000:23-25). Postmodernism is not a style but as Jameson states, "a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and

coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features”(1993:64). Postmodern consumerism sees waste, expenditure or gift as the engine of economic behaviour (Nodoushani, 1999:333). While postmodernism and political economy seem unrelated, they in fact have become dependent on each other, as aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production generally. Jameson notes

the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation (1993:65).

Angela McRobbie acknowledges that in the field where Jameson’s thesis is most markedly appropriate – that of pop music and its subsidiaries – there is no question of denying the consumers or fans their place (1994:20). She stresses that the way in which this integration between fans/consumers and popular music remains conceptually problematic. For example, the wearer of Sean John, P Diddy’s clothing label may not listen to P.Diddy, but still may want to be associated with his attributes (see chapter six).

Such integration becomes a battle to discover new commodities as “cool” and new forms of music as alternative. However, Stratton poses the problem that “the new” cannot also be “popular” (1983: 306). Popularity requires a degree of acquaintance, by which time the new is no longer original. Original music for example, is considered positively because it offers new opportunities for involvement. The point at which original music is celebrated and adopted by a mass audience, as

opposed to niche cliques thought of as subcultures, is when the fashion behind the music becomes available to a mass audience. Richard Middleton states

we do not choose our musical tastes freely; nor do they reflect our 'experience' in any simple way. The involvement of subjects in particular musical pleasures has to be constructed; indeed, such construction is part and parcel of the production of subjectivity (1990:249).

This construction is achieved via clothing, and one looks to music stars for that inspiration or marker of credibility, regardless of subculture.

To examine at the cultural level the way groups of human beings produce, sustain and transform meaning in their music cannot be done merely through subcultures, but through consumption habits. Music has been commodified through fashion and the public (with the fashion industry's help) has accepted this commodification with open arms. Audience, performer and designer have become an interactive medley in which the fashion cycle becomes dependent on a music chart. As an editorial in the summer 2004 edition of *Strut* Magazine states, "Music is the future of fashion. Rock Stars are its most ardent supporters, its most grandiose billboards, its slickest conduits. They bring fashion to the masses and then flip it back from the streets to the runways" (Weitzman, 2004:18).

Baudrillard saw that there was a shift towards the commodification of all cultural objects and Jameson attested that postmodernism, is "the cultural logic of late capitalism." This commodification occurs in other avenues of popular culture, but the symbiosis of fashion and music shows how culture is still dealing with the socio-economic effects of postmodernity (Hutcheon, 2002:25). To illustrate the application of postmodern contingency to the analysis of popular music styles, artist Mario Milzia

produced a piece entitled “Style Mixer,” which looks like a vinyl record or Frisbee that becomes a technical device that can predict style trends. By spinning two shiny black discs, one may create fantasy genres with 250 words and over 15 000 combinations. As Milzia comments, “the dial works particularly well for music, because music trends move so fast. So it’s not impossible to imagine organic techno, or my personal favorite, postmodern hardcore” (Lack, 2004:96). Such postmodern blending results in a new form of fusion in music and then fashion, eventually causing the entity to become entirely commodified only for the process to cycle again.

Postmodernism depends on consumerism just as much as music depends on fashion, as it is best to see

“postmodernity” as a specific phase in an inversion and abstraction process which proceeds through the commodity-form and capitalist social relations, assimilating first the physical object, then the entire sphere of culture and everyday life, extending to the commodified exchange of images, signs and events in mass-media society (Best, 1989:54).

There are many distinctive postmodern tendencies, such as a propensity for bizarre juxtapositions, genre combinations and general mixing of codes and these play heavily in the areas of music and fashion (Brown, 1995:74). As much as one wants to move on from postmodernism to post-postmodernism, our culture is content with images producing not meaning, but other self-referencing images. This occurs via the music star that becomes the talk of the town. Gottdiener notes that the system of fashion is an ideology propagated by the fashion and advertising industries to control appearance in order to sell commodities (1989:28). This control of appearance is directly linked to the popularity of music stars, as in

this new postmodern world, images and signs proliferate to the point where previous distinctions between illusion and reality, signifier and signified, subject and object, collapse ... and there is no longer any social or real world of which to speak, only a semiotically self-referring “hyper-reality” (1989:41).

Baudrillard’s conception of hyper-reality, where codes of reality are used to simulate reality in cases where there is no referent to the real world, is very evident in this fashion age, as music artists’ image is represented by music video and what they wear (1994:2). This third order of simulacra is the simulation, which is associated with the postmodern age. Here, we are confronted with the precession of simulacra, where the representation precedes and determines what is real. The image no longer refers to anything, but becomes what is referred to. There is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum. For Gilles Deleuze (1998), simulacra raise the work of art beyond representation, where it is on equal footing with the original so that the original is destroyed. The simulacra changes the way we view a work of art or experience a sensation, disposing of the hierarchy that values the original and the referent above all for a system in which the viewer and his or her interpretation is more important than the underlying ideas.

Baudrillard points to a number of phenomena to explain this loss of distinctions between reality and the simulacrum. He states

so there is something more than that which is peculiar to our modern media images: if they fascinate us so much it is not because they are sites of the production of meaning and representation – this would not be new – it is on the contrary because they are sites of disappearance of meaning and representation, sites in which we are caught quite apart from any judgement of reality, thus sites of a fatal strategy of denigration of the real and of the reality principle (1993:194).

While he addresses contemporary culture, including movies, TV, magazines, billboards and the Internet, popular music and fashion must be included as well. We no longer acquire goods because of real needs, but because of desires defined by commercialized images, which keep us one step removed from the reality of our needs, our bodies and the limitations of the world around us. The postmodern age is defined by the loss of all sense of use-value. Consumption comes to define identity, or identity is perceived as a set of ideas rather than developing in relation to experience and others. Marcuse was early to note that

the people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced (30:1964).

Through popular culture, commodities become desired and are accepted as part of day to day living. To discuss where somebody acquired their clothing or how the new Kelly Clarkson disc sounds like is a natural part of our conversations. The relationship between music and clothing does not rely on subculture theory, but rather on a fashion cycle that switches for a number of reasons due to postmodernism, as, “beauty itself is only a product of difference, and fashion is quite capable of presenting the most eccentric, dysfunctional, ridiculous traits as eminently beautiful, so long as they are sufficiently different from what went before” (Baudrillard, 1981:79). Hutcheson notes, postmodernism’s initial concern is “to denaturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ are in fact ‘cultural’” (2000:2). This constant shuffle between natural and cultural is witnessed in music video.

A certain style is established through music video – a cultural form becomes a code associated or normalized/naturalized with a particular music identity but that at any time may become altered. As Will Straw comments on the nature of music video

like a variety of texts designated as postmodern, music video involves a particular play of elements within two forces acting to bring about closure: on the one hand, the underlying structure, with its tendency to ground the assemblage of quoted elements, and on the other, the immediate cultural horizon from which these elements are taken (1993:16).

For example, hip-hop and rap videos in the 1980s and early 1990s showed rappers in urban ghettos wearing sports memorabilia, such as L.A. Raiders insignias. Key characteristics of hip-hop videos now include an emphasis on bling (luxury items), booty (many attractive females gyrating) and Bacardi (partying).

Music sometimes acts like a hidden text as it is incorporated into other avenues. Music is used in film soundtracks, music stars are showcased in media magazines, music is played in public and private spaces and viewers embrace music videos although they may not present a clear linear narrative. As long as music videos provide a continuing forum for fashion and experimental video techniques that evolves from its predecessors, they become embraced as a vehicle for defining style. Music video traps one in a fashion myth by making us believe that subculture rather than the fashion cycle dictates current trends, as:

the image of musical presence is split from the musical sound, and makes itself more powerful than the sound precisely on the basis of music's contribution. The image speaks in two languages at once, first as a literal meaning (singing, words) and, at the second order, the plane of myth, as form, which puts the meaning at a distance so that it can be appropriated into a new situational intentionally (Berland, 1993:37).

While Althusser's (1971) definition of ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of existence, myth gives a clarity which is not that of an explanation, but a statement of fact (Barthes, 1972:143). The idea of subculture was a myth that tried to help explain a groups' ideology. In this post-subculture era, there are so many segments of society that very few people could actually belong to a pure subculture. Joseph Turow (1997) calls this "hypersegmentation," as in each genre and in each style there are vast, but small, choices that try to appeal to a mass public.

How the style gets reproduced, who purchases it, when in the cycle it is purchased and what message becomes of it is of more importance than discovering the exact origin of the style. Clothes-as-artifacts create behaviour through their capacity to impose social identities and to empower people in creating latent social identities (Crane, 2000:2). Since we want to be part of a group but yet seek uniqueness, the idea of subculture and mainstream will still perpetuate itself. As Barthes states

we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is still mystified (1972:159).

Rather than look to the myth of subculture to address the meaning of style, the relationships among music, the fashion cycle and cultural phenomena need to be explored via a political economy and postmodern approach. Stuart Hall notes that

popular culture looks at the process by which these relations of dominance and subordination are articulated. It treats them as a process: the process by means of which some things are actively preferred so that others can be dethroned (1981:235).

Styles become outdated and cultural phenomena are washed away. Based on the fashion cycle, this cycle perpetuates itself based on music, and therefore music video, and the star need to be considered as high-style markers.

While social reality is experienced through language, communication and imagery, social meanings and social differences are inextricably tied up with representation (McRobbie, 2000:193). Music video offers a venue for representations of fashion to be exposed, providing clothing and accessories as expressions of identity. Theodore Gracyk believes that identity only arises against the backdrop of a public language, and thus identity is intrinsically connected to a history of actions with public characters (2001:203). David Harvey notes that this search for security and collective identity, the need to acquire self-respect and status all play a role in shaping modes of consumption and lifestyles (1989:123). Therefore, what music stars wear – in public, in private and in performance – provide ideas for developing personal identity. Yet, personal identity is inherently tied to simulation due to the images presented in music video. One's identity is then comprised of image fragments that lead one to reaffirm one's taste in music and also set a model of an ideal appearance that leads to one's fashion choices. These tastes become embedded in the music and through the music star, so much so that "we know without knowing how we know them" (Frith, 2001:104).

Culture in Capitalism: Adorno's Key Oversight

Appearance is not, as postmodern theory suggests, composed of purely free-floating signifiers, but appears to be constructed according to socially acquired tastes and preferences which lead to the domination of a certain style in music and fashion (Muggleton, 2000:92). Music stars now have the opportunity to showcase style in a variety of ways through magazines, performance and music video. They develop a signature look that becomes commodified and transformed into their own images (Jameson 1993:69). Middleton notes, “they [stars] become so close and yet so impossibly far away, an invitation to a life of unmatched intensity yet at the same time an institutionalized function in the ideological structure — the star is the domain of identification” (1990:249). Sawchuk (1987) argues that cultural phenomena — events, objects, and images — do not have one fixed or stable meaning, but derive their significance from their place in a chain of signifiers. Existing in time, and therefore subject to temporal fluctuations, this chain itself is not a stable source of meaning, but it is where ideas about appearance are constructed and these values then become interpreted by a mass populace, all producing different meanings out of the same things (Barnard, 2002:171).

Although Robert Holland argues that postmodern approaches are rather ineffective in understanding the ‘economization’ of the cultural industries (2002:158), one needs to understand that the key characteristics of postmodernism — forward-looking, amusing and light, cultured without being boring, sophisticated without being elitist, complex without being obscure (Berardinelli, 1999:93) — fall under the rubric of industrial production and commercialization of products. These

characteristics are the key components to our current state of popular culture. Commodities are now consumed not because they satisfy some practical need, but because they serve as ways of differentiating individuals within the social hierarchy (Negrin, 1999:113). Mike Featherstone notes that, in our modern consumer culture, a new conception of the self has emerged — the self as performer — which places great emphasis upon appearance, display and the management of impressions (1991:187-93). The self is allowed to manage its impressions through popular music, as the music is displayed in avenues such as music video and in the performers themselves. These impressions then translate to clothing, giving the impression of being highly sought after in retail outlets. The self is more concerned with outward-showing characteristics that can be purchased and replaces the 19th-century concern with character in which primacy was given to such qualities as citizenship, democracy, duty, work, honour, reputation and morals (Negrin, 1999:111). What matters more now is whether your jeans are the right cut and wash.

While postmodernism allows for individual expression, we cannot ignore the fact that postmodern society is still premised under that basis of capitalist society. Theodor Adorno's (1991) work in the area of the culture industry is a starting framework for the analysis of popular culture under capitalism. However, while Adorno was correct in stating that all mass culture was adaptation (1991:67), he was incorrect in the notion that consumers are "an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery" (1991:99), and that "mass culture is a kind of training for life when things have gone wrong" (1991:91). Adorno was concerned that mass culture was being based around pre-digested products that lacked conflict, intrigue and

development. Once culture was reduced to commodity, goods were not genuinely experienced, as the recognition of brand names took the place of choice (Adorno, 1991:85). Adorno believed that the public experience a process of subordination that becomes a quantifiable contest dominant upon advertising, information and command. If one cannot participate in “watercooler talk” about the latest television show, trend or popular event, one becomes displaced and out of the loop. The culture industry continues to be perpetuated, as according to Adorno, we “fall for the swindle” (1999:103) as “the culture industry impedes the development of autonomous, independent, individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves”(1991: 106). Conformity replaces consciousness as the culture industry creates behavioural formulas. Adorno neglected to consider that even through these formulas and myriads of similar product, *there still lies some degree of choice*, that cultural products such as clothing still provide an opportunity for personal expression.

To overlook the economic ramifications of culture is a huge disservice to the understanding of our conditions, since money is our central means of communication. As Robert Babe states, “culture is our business and business is our culture” (2003:4). Shane Gunster (2004) notes that despite the increasing prevalence of commodification as a dominant factor in the production, promotion and consumption of most forms of mass culture, many in the cultural studies field have failed to engage systematically either with culture as commodity or with critical theory. Robert McChesney notes that:

cultural studies, for example, often is concerned with the relationship of media ‘texts’ to audiences and both of them to existing class and social relations, but it is mostly uninterested in examining the structural factors

that influence the production of media content. It is also uninterested, for the most part, with the broader relationship of economics to politics (2000:110).

Analysis of this relationship of economics to politics, and for that matter culture, must be premised on the rules of capitalism. The role of cultural studies is to understand how the forces of capitalism (re-)produce class and social relations in media texts.

Adorno did not want to admit that capitalism was a factor of culture because popular media consumers could be categorized as mindless dupes. However, we must avoid purely economic deterministic explanations. For example, within social classes, individuals compete for social distinction and cultural capital on the basis of their capacity to judge the suitability of cultural products according to class-based standards of taste and manners. This search for distinction happens in mass and elite culture. Jim Collins (2002) claims that one of the most significant developments in the popular culture of the past decade has been the popularization of elite tastes for mass audiences. The traditional categories of high and low culture (see Gans, 1975) are challenged as Collins offers a new form – high-pop. It is different from “real” high culture due to the levels of authenticity and knowledge that one supposedly needs to understand and appreciate high culture:

While the appropriation of popular culture was also one of the defining characteristics of the postmodern texts of the 1980s, the popular remained within quotation marks, and as such, functioned as a critique of the orthodoxy of modernist sensibilities. High-pop depends on the appropriation of elite cultural pleasure without quotation marks, an appropriation not just of specific icons or canonical quotation marks but

entire protocols for demonstrating taste and social distinction (Collins, 2002:6).

Adorno would like to believe that certain texts consumed have more validity than the other, but the fact is that in each case – especially with high-pop – one makes some sort of choice.

Under capitalism, there must exist the rich, the poor and the middle class, and each will enjoy forms of popular music and fashion that will be full of unresolved contradictions. Adorno would find fault with the fashion cycle structure, as it is based on a formula that creates new products so that society can measure, compare and assess themselves through physical, instead of intellectual phenomena. Rather than blaming our culture for acting this way, one needs to discover *why this is the case*. The price of clothing is not a set price; neither is the cost of a music concert. The price is relative to what the public is willing to pay and this expense depends on what stage the fashion cycle is in, which works as a hegemonic force (see next chapter).

As Bourdieu notes

the artist who puts her name on a ready-made article and produces an object whose market price is incommensurate with its cost of production is collectively mandated to perform a magic act which would be nothing without the whole tradition leading up to her gesture, and without the universe of celebrants and believers who give it meaning and value in terms of that tradition (1993:81).

While the idea of bricolage allows one a variety of ambiguous and contradictory looks and identities, culture is the ensemble of practices and ideologies that define our relationship to capitalism (Willis, 1993:382). Although there is a tendency to adapt to general style trends, each time the fashion cycle is carried out, new looks and styles

evolve that could only have emerged based on what just recently transpired. New styles are only judged the same by those who do not see the value of mass culture.

Music Stars: Cultural Phenomena as Fashion Trends

The significance of fashion and beauty practices are not just about what we wear, but also how we wear it and what we listen to, as the artist and mass audience are linked by an ordered sequence of events as shown by Hirsch (1990:128). Before it can elicit any audience response, an art object first must succeed in competing against other objects for selection and promotion by an entrepreneurial organization, and then in receiving mass media coverage in such forms as book reviews and film criticisms. This is why Shumway suggests that

a star is not revered only for his or her ability or achievements; fans imagine a personal relationship with the stars they worship. In order for such imaginary relationships to be constructed, the artist cannot appear merely to be a professional, no matter how excellent his or her work (1999:196).

A star must appear attractive, and the link between fashion and music shall determine this construct.

Popular music has a special value for being able to put into play a sense of identity that may or may not fit the way we are placed by other social forces. As identity is an ideal – what we would like to be – the music video and the music star give us an ideal of a fashionable look that we would like to achieve. Donna Haraway (quoted in Fuchs, 1999:179) observes that images are produced in part through and by processes of consumption, experiences of perception and listening to and viewing subjects in specific situations. Because music has a complex association with fashion,

images that music stars create are far more powerful than the recorded song as music video can appear to make “image” more important than the experience of the music itself (Fuchs, 1999:180). Fashion, in its turn, has been moving into performance as the traditional catwalk, has been supplemented by music, lighting, dance and even narrative (Wollen, 2002:168). The result of this shift is that music video now becomes a key component in determining fashion trends. This reaffirms Anne Hollander’s (1989) argument that the meaning of clothes is conditioned by pictorial images (Young, 1994:197).

Baudrillard claims that since we now live in a culture in which we have a video recorder in our head, we are constantly in the position of having to transform ourselves in the anticipation of what we might look like as an image (quoted in Lury, 1998:78). The image is then composed, at least in part, of the clothes that one wears. However, there is no definable code to determining what clothes evoke. Clothing allows the individual to communicate particular information on a more active, individual and changeable basis, so when clothing is used as a code, like language, it is least successful as a means of communication (McCracken, 1990:61,64). One person may locate the origin of meaning outside the garment or ensemble, in some external authority such as the designer, the brand or the wearer and another person can locate the generation of meaning in the garment or ensemble itself in textures, colours and shapes and the permutations of these textures, colours and shapes (Barnard, 2002:73). Clothing reveals both themes and formal relationships that give a culture ideas of the real or imagined basis. This real or imagined basis that defines where one finds meaning in the garment all depends on a music star who emerges as a

cultural phenomenon and defines what is in fashion, thereby contributing to defining the hegemony of the period.

Gramsci's (1971) definition of hegemony – that dominant ideologies are often offered as “common sense,” and that dominant ideologies are in tension with other forces, hence are constantly in flux, indicates how ideological meaning is an object of struggle rather than an oppressive force that fully dominates a subject from above. Malcolm Barnard defines Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony as “referring to the situation that exists when certain social groups, or certain fractions of social groups, in positions of dominance, are able to exert their social authority as a result of their power, appearing and being experienced as natural and legitimate” (2002:95). A cultural icon thus is one that establishes their look as *the look* without making it seem forced or contrived. Angela McRobbie notes that as neo liberal values make remarkable inroads into the culture industries, the star and celebrity system becomes even more firmly installed as a hallmark of fashion culture (2003:61). Buxton also concurs that

rock stars, as agents of consumer discipline, help to define the norms and limits of the existing socio-historical consumer, and thus individual possibilities. They anchor a chaotic aesthetic-ideological discourse and represent it in a ‘humanized’ form by investing the human body itself. (1989:434).

While fashion and celebrity have had an intimate partnership with film (Breward, 2003:131) as “a focus on stars directs our attention to the international lexicon through which narrative cinema generated a vast film going constituency” (Negra, 2001:2), music video has altered the persona of the star in the moving image. Actors, who play roles in a film, adopt the persona of their particular character. The actors do

not have the same personas in daily life, nor do they have to wear the same clothes or have the same mannerisms as performed in the film. However, the star of a music video represents the song and his/her star image – there is no separation of persona, no private self.

The music video dictates the music artists' style, demeanor and attitude. The music artist is not allowed to be out of character. They cannot perform on stage or act in a music video and then behave differently in their daily routine of life. The music video and mass media define who the music star in fact is. If one enjoys a certain actor's performance, one will seek out other works by that actor but there is an understanding that the actor on-screen and the actor in life are different. The music artist does not have this option, as every action must be coherent or fans will scream "sell out." When an actor known for comedies wants to act in a drama, it is a risky venture for the studio. However, the actor is commended for breaking new ground. If a music artist changes his or her sound or look in a dramatic fashion, it is considered a grave risk. A movie star is recognized, admired or hated and expected to deliver a certain type of performance on screen. A music star is recognized, admired or hated and expected *to be* a certain performer.

While anybody can become a celebrity, gaining popularity and wide attention for some sort of accomplishment, few emerge as icons. Icons are stars who possess a certain style that is recognized, desired and long-lasting. They create their own definition of style and display it most often with grace. They have an aura that tries to be duplicated and they achieve cultural phenomena status. They become part of

everyday conversation and are self-referenced to styles and behaviours. Music icons' relation to fashion is the basis of the next chapter.

Chapter Four – Just Browsing or Celebrity Window Shopping: Popular Icons as Popular Fashion

Now that a link between fashion and music has been established outside the parameters of subculture theory, one needs to consider how a music star contributes to fashion attributes regardless of the genre of music they represent.¹ A star's image emerges and he or she dictates certain looks and ideals. Britney Spears will be the focus of this chapter. Whether one finds her credible as an artist or not, it must be accepted that she has helped to promote some very significant fashion changes, notably the shift from what Flugel calls "the erogenous zone of the female body" to the midriff area (1950:66).

Britney Spears is a popular cultural icon. Now aged twenty-four, she has sold over fifty-six million albums, starred in a movie that grossed over thirty-five million dollars and topped the list of web searches worldwide on the Google search engine in 2003 – no less than 55 billion of them. She also placed fourth in The Lycos 50 list of the most popular web search terms in 2002² and took first place in 2000.³ All of her albums (except for a greatest hits release) charted at number one in their first week of release, with more than 609,000 copies of her fourth album, *In the Zone* selling in its first week.⁴ In 2001, *Forbes* magazine ranked her as the fourth highest paid celebrity behind Tom Cruise, Tiger Woods and the Beatles.⁵ In 2005, in spite of her Onyx Hotel Tour being cut short due to a knee injury, she managed to gross \$13.8 million, which is a \$100 000 more than Kiss but a \$100 000 less than U2.⁶ Considering that U2 and Kiss have been in the music game as long as Spears has been alive, her monetary accomplishments must be recognized for what they are – mammoth.⁷

More importantly for this analysis, she inspired and influenced several trends in clothing. While Spears may have not been the first to wear these items, thanks to her videos and constant exposure, her signature looks have become available to millions of teens and mass public in general throughout malls by retailers (re) appropriating her image.⁸

Paul Nystrom notes that there are three classes of factors that influence the character and direction of fashion movements: *dominating events, dominating ideals and dominating groups* (1928:103). Spears, or any mass music star for that matter, must fulfill these three factors. Their popularity depends on their emotional force, their ability to build a mass following out of intensely personal desires. Whether one is writing about grunge or pop music, these personal desires are expressed and become co-opted by mall culture as, no matter the genre or style, the look has to be purchased and trickled-down for mass consumption (see chapter two). Spears creates events that produce dominating ideals for a large demographic. Her videos such as "Oops!...I Did it Again" or "Boys" conjure up notions of promiscuous-yet-wholesome sexuality (See appendix one for all videos). At the beginning of her pop singing career, she appropriated black urban music and used highly sexually charged videos while maintaining an innocent image. This image attracted a young fan base (notably girls) and caused moral panic among critics and parents, yet increased her popularity with larger audiences (notably men).⁹ An equal number of contradictions run through the whole Britney Spears package as these complexities and contradictions help show off her various images and looks. As David Gauntlett states

there's something for everyone. For the moralists, there's the church-going all American girl who said she would not sleep with her boyfriend; but for those who don't like manufactured pop mannequins, there is the control freak who exercises a growing amount of control over her image and music (2002:226).

As her image evolved, Spears managed to gain a slightly older demographic and become a fashion leader. She has become a one-word entity where "Britney" takes on a whole set of values and meanings. Although only one person, she possess a Holy Trinity-like complex where in Britney Spears is her artist name, Britney has become a fashion style and way of life and Spears is her other persona, her real self that rarely gets displayed. To distinguish between the three, her full name shall be used when referring to the artist, when referring to a result from her looks or attitude, "Britney" shall be used and "Spears" will be used when referring to her as a person without her superpowers.

Britney Spears' appropriation of black urban music links the white middle class with the black urban class. Since the 1950s white-middle class girls had little opportunity to know black people – the working class, jazz and rock and roll were forbidden (Tolman, 1996). Spears was now revealing some of this forbidden world as common privileged sites for working-class youth such as the basketball court, the shopping mall, the darkly lit street corner, the video arcade, the urban dance hall, decaying housing projects and second-hand automobiles (Giroux, 1998:25), have all been featured in her videos. Spears' musical style and lyrics also take on common themes of black female rappers, such as heterosexual courtship and public displays of physical and sexual freedom. The bumps, grinds and thrusts of the hips, butt and

entire lower body graphically mark the place of sexuality and the erotic in the popular music and dance of black youth (Rose, 1992).¹⁰ Spears uses this to her advantages in videos such as "...Baby One More Time," "Crazy," and "My Prerogative."

The look that Britney assumes in music video and in her working life manages to grab the attention of the mass public. In music video the images of young, uniformed high school girls getting in trouble ("...Baby One More Time"), back-up dancers dripping in sweat in a small crowded room ("Slave 4 U") or the foxy airline stewardess ("Toxic") resonate as sexy stereotypes in popular culture. Her performances – notably at the MTV Music Video Awards where in 2002 she shed her suit to reveal a nude-coloured bra and pants¹¹, danced with a snake in 2003 and kissed Madonna in 2004 – created media frenzies that got replayed over and over.

Therefore she manages to construct dominating ideals for dominating groups through her fashions by using the body to convey messages of sexuality and the liminal space between adolescence and adulthood. Now new stars such as Hilary Duff are taking care of Spears' past key demographic, tweens – pre-teenagers from eight to thirteen – as Spears takes on a more adult persona. Tweens have become a demographic with strong purchasing power, as they influence fashion trends for others and for the immediate future. When the July 2003 *Vanity Fair* cover is composed of nine teen stars (who are not even the target readers of the magazine), it indicates a change that popular style emerges from this particular demographic rather than the elite who attend fashion shows.¹² In the same *Vanity Fair* issue, a magazine article asked twenty-eight top teen stars to choose simply between Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. Britney Spears emerged the winner as she "has done a better job

protecting her brand than Christina” (Wolcott, 2003:157). This potent combination of affluent teens with vast knowledge about style and brands results in Spears being a major fashion force.

Madonna and Britney: Touched For the Very First Time

Any analysis performed in this chapter could be applied equally to any other music star. For example, Madonna used control and creativity within her subordinate class position to produce her own style that often appeared in partial, contradictory and even amputated forms, such as underwear worn outside skirts, loose T-shirts, cheap bracelets, earrings, chains and crucifixes. John Fiske described Madonna as “a site of semiotic struggle between the forces of patriarchal control and feminine resistance, of capitalism and the subordinate, of the adult and young” (1989:99). Madonna made it possible for teenage girls to produce their own identity, to make their so-called own fashion statements and to reject standard fashion codes (Kellner, 1994:167).

There are many similarities between the one-word entities “Britney” and “Madonna.” Both have experienced polarization: in the 1986 Countdown polls, Madonna was voted as top vocalist, the only female in the top 20 sex/lust objects, but she also won second place for “Turkey of the Year” award (Fiske, 1989:102). Readers of *Rolling Stone* magazine¹³ in 2003 voted Spears as best-dressed celebrity while she was voted worst-dressed performer by *Spin* magazine. Both icons have used their videos to show women in powerful positions vis-à-vis men, both have paid homage to Marilyn Monroe (Madonna’s “Material Girl” and Spears’ “Lucky”) and both have

relied on recently-departed photographer Herb Ritts to convey their sexuality (Madonna's "Cherish" and Spears' "Don't Be the Last to Know").

Each has also paid tribute to one another – Madonna wore a Britney Spears T-shirt on her last tour and Britney danced to "Into the Groove" in the opening *Crossroads*. Now instead of a star/spectator relationship of fandom, we have a star/star relationship where each star becomes a spectator of the other. Spears has become relevant insofar as she relates to Madonna's own identity. Pre-the infamous kiss at the MTV Music Awards, Madonna displayed a motherly role towards Spears, making comments about how she deals with Spears' rampant celebrity status. Madonna states, "Well, obviously I'm embracing it because I know it's going to confuse people, but the true essence of my feelings for her is that I feel really protective of her. Don't even ask me why" (Madonna as quoted in Clerk, 2002: 157). With that kiss, which became as famous as Judas kissing Jesus, Madonna passed on the reins of female stardom to Spears. The lead-off single from *In The Zone* "Me Against the Music," is the official right of passage, as Madonna sings to Spears, "Hey Britney, they say you want to lose control. Sexy lady....I'd rather see you bare your soul." Spears now becomes as complicated of a star as Madonna, perhaps even more so, as Madonna had to take on a new persona to be a star whereas Spears lives with hers.¹⁴ Madonna had worked as a dancer and did what ever it took to get noticed – from posing for nude photographs to hanging out in night clubs. It was only until she adopted the Madonna persona that singles such as "Holiday" and "Lucky Star" began to take off. Madonna sought stardom but with Spears stardom sought her. She appeared on *Star Search* - a program where two up and coming talents compete

against each other, the Mickey Mouse club and did her first tour in shopping malls. With all of these events, Spears could not morph into another persona on stage as her stage life was her real life. Although all performers by nature perform, and therefore take a character role on stage, with Spears the transition between stage and street does not exist.

In 1987, MTV asked viewers to make their own Madonna videos, most of which were aired on television. This program allowed the viewers to pick and choose an aspect of Madonna and recreate it with their own meaning. MTV recently aired a show entitled *Becoming* where for a half an hour, a lucky person gets to be made over into a music star and recreate one of the artist's initial videos. The participants are groomed and styled exactly like the artist as the video in *Becoming* is a shot by shot recreation. This makes the artist's video the official sacred marker of their image. This new version does not allow the viewer a chance to provide their own representation of their favourite star as it is more important to properly mimic the artist's image than have the participant contribute their own personal meaning. Another show on MTV provides a participant an even closer proximity to their desired artist. *I Want A Famous Face* featured a participant, Mia, getting a breast implant operation in order to better resemble Spears. Behind the music is the look which, as seen through Spears' images, can cause massive shifts in the current culture with respect to fashion, appearance and beauty.

Britney + Sex ≠ Feminism

It should be emphasized that I do not intend to undertake a comprehensive gender analysis of Spears, but rather look at how her music and style contribute to hegemonic forces in fashion and culture. This analysis will show that the largest and most important difference between the current material girl and the original one is the embracing of brands in music and fashion. Spears' contribution has very little to do with gender and sexuality; the way that Spears' image contributes to definitions of sexuality via her clothing is important to address, but more crucial is *how* artists are used to market their image as fashion leaders and the consumptive practices that lead to star/celebrity branding. How the marketing of sexuality relates to feminism is not the main part of the analysis as the focus lies in **how music stars contribute to fashion and not to gender development**, although the two may be linked in a high capacity. Popular culture teaches young people to gaze inwardly at the body as a stylized fashion-scape, an aesthetic spectacle, a commodified sexual object (Brooks, 2003:8). While it is easy to criticize the sexualized state of today's teen girls, it is because part of the modern ideology of sex is that lust is the province of men, purity that of women (Rubin, 1993:33). However, Spears has made it acceptable to embrace one's sexuality, as she becomes a sign that denotes certain values that subconsciously become accepted through one's attire.

After the boom, bust and echo of alternative rock in the mid-nineties, the Spice Girls showed everybody where the money and power lies - in female fashion and consumption. Again, "Sporty," "Scary," "Ginger," "Posh," and "Baby," were never based on subcultural aspects but on personality traits. Those traits all became rolled

into one superstar commodity that is Britney Spears. This Girl Culture, first initiated by the Spice Girls, shows that females can emerge as powerful figures as long as

they've found something that makes them just a little bigger than expected. While feminism tried to imagine what women could become, Girl Culture urges them to enjoy what they have – muscles, guile, sex appeal – and to go ahead and use it (Powers, 1997:202).

Spears provides an outlet for girls to take an interest in their own bodies and gives them a source of approval outside of parents to be proud of their gender as Linda M. Scott notes “beauty has sometimes provided women with some relief and some control over their circumstances” (1993:154). Comments such as “if I had an opportunity to shoot Britney Spears, I think I would” from Maryland’s first lady, Kendel Elrich, only fuel the fire for the notion that sexiness equals independence (Stepp, 2003:C5).

Although Spears’ image definitely plays upon gender construction (and the weak female), the issue of Spears’ music being inauthentic is irrelevant, for she is as authentic as Kurt Cobain or the entire male oriented grunge movement was. Both Cobain’s grunge and Britney’s bubblegum pop are media constructs (Shevory, 1995).

As Mike McPadden asserts:

Both (Mudhoney’s) “Touch Me I’m Sick” and “...Baby One More Time” crystallized, by generally improving upon, the scenes from which they arose (Sasquatch scented, Stooze metal lumber punk in the case of Mudhoney; billion-selling pseudo-castrati boy-groups-for girls with Britney.) Both songs hit hard and hit often and hit you in places you didn’t know you were supposed to feel anything so deep, and lyrically each cries out in desperation for a frantic laying on of hands, the better to move masses – and units – with (271: 2001).

Both Mudhoney and Britney Spears provoke a deep response from listeners. These responses resonate in fashion and lifestyle choices through visual culture and

are not found directly in the song lyrics or melody but via a combination of the two with music video. While Frith and McRobbie's *Rock and Sexuality* (1978) started the framework for understanding how music is used to display one's sexuality, much has been written after this seminal piece. The major oversight in Frith and McRobbie's initial exploration of rock and sexuality is that rock music is not about sexuality, but rather a signifying practice through which a discourse of sexuality is constituted (Frith, 1990:421). As McRobbie now states, "the theoretical perspective to be adopted in analyzing the relations between culture and society had to be understood as a component of the phenomenon which was the object of study" (2002:130). Through the phenomenon of Britney Spears, one can gather discourses of sexuality that emerge *out of responses* from the music. These responses are found in clothing.

The responses do seem gender specific, but I believe they require a different theoretical framework. Theodore Gracyk concludes that "what women seek in music is different, what they enjoy is different, and what they derive from the experience of music is different" (2001:169) and Dean Abt notes that "females are significantly more likely than males to have their purchases influenced by music video; to have their interest in music increased because of video; and to think about the video when listening to a song" (1992:107). I believe that the above statements still need more quantifiable proof as Gracyk fails to pinpoint what is actually different in women's experience with music. Acknowledging the difference is an interesting notion but will require afterthoughts like *Rock and Sexuality* (1978) did, as Mudhoney's grunge look for males was equally as important and influential as Britney's midriff.

With Spears' popularity, other female pop stars (as well as male music stars) have emerged with lavish music video productions, inducing a larger fashion presence. Christina Aguilera, Gwen Stefani, Beyonce Knowles, Avril Lavigne, Jessica Simpson and, of course, Madonna have all recently appeared on the covers of fashion magazines. This switch from supermodel to music star in fashion magazines is understood through icons such as Spears using a methodology and theory outside the realm of feminism.

Content Analysis and Methodology

Andy Bennett notes that there is currently an absence of critical debate concerning methodological procedure in the study of youth culture and popular music:

there is little to be gained from privileging empirical research over theory simply on the basis that it is somehow 'more in touch' with the object of study. On the contrary, the movement of research on beyond the realm of theoretical abstraction and into the clubs, streets and festival fields where young people and music interact demands, in addition to written accounts of the research findings, a body of work that critically reflects on the research process itself (2002:463).

Rather than use a combination of theory and ethnographic practices to assess which are the key fashion looks that Britney Spears is responsible for, semiotic content analysis is the primary methodology used here, as it seeks to understand data not as a collection of physical events but as symbolic phenomena (Krippendorff, 1980:7). By analyzing Spears' portrayal in magazines and the media, one can try to explain why certain values and attitudes have been associated with Spears and how this translates with respect to clothing and fashion trends. As content analysis is defined as "a

research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context,” (Krippendorff, 1980:21) or “an empirical (observational) and objective procedure for quantifying recorded audio-visual representation using reliable, explicitly defined categories,” (Bell, 2001:13) it seems like the best method to make valid inferences from an auditory medium such as music to a visual one such as fashion. While quantitative content analysis is best suited to describing manifest content, qualitative content analysis (also known as semiotic content analysis), is better at revealing the latent meaning of messages. Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods should offer insight into the implications of Spears’ influence on popular culture and the ways in which music stars affect communication via fashion.

While Spears’ image transcends various media, magazines were specifically chosen for the analysis since they are the forum in which fashion is most often discussed and displayed. As Katya Mandoki notes

What appears to potential customers is the aesthetic representation of particular attitudes, personal beauty, and ideal situations of the models more than the dress advertised. In this sense, it is less the content or explicit denotation of clothes than the connotations generated by these images that pulls women to linger over these magazines and purchase particular items. Not merely a source of information, nor mere description of clothes and styles, fashion magazines are personal invitations to visit and dwell in social and individual imaginaries (2003:601).

Moreover, magazines were used to examine how Spears is portrayed to mass audiences, as her image is less constructed here than in music videos as directors, stylists, publicists and record management all have some sort of creative input. Although her image in magazines is partly formed by numerous stylists, a large sample of magazines helps provide some balance.

Seventy-five magazines with Britney Spears on the cover were purchased between 2002 and 2004 (see appendix two). Of those, forty were chosen at random from various categories to span the diverse range of her fashion image - ten from tabloid magazines such as *The National Enquirer* and *The Star*, ten from celebrity magazines such as *US*, *People* and *In Touch*, ten from teen magazines such as *M* and *Seventeen* and ten from men and women's specialty magazines such as *GQ* and *W*.

The purpose of the analysis was to try to describe salient aspects of how groups of texts (images, visual texts) represent some kind of people, processes, events and/or interrelationships between or amongst them. When performing content analysis one decides whether to consider designation analysis (e.g. direct references to Britney), assertions analysis (which could relate to specific references, such as what she is wearing), or sign-vehicle analysis (which is simply counting the number of times that she appears). I chose assertions analysis because what is trying to be determined is her relationship to fashion. The pictures on the magazine covers were not counted, but all of the pictures inside the magazines were. Headshots and advertisements were not included in the coding, but in the overall number of appearances in the magazines: headshots do not allow the reader to identify an overall fashion look and advertisements would bias the analysis towards certain brands. I also coded any textual references in the magazines relating/connecting Spears to fashion about her or about another star in their captions; however, this is secondary in nature, as the main analysis is to quantify her look and to determine from it if any inferences can be made.

In only 40 magazines, there were 340 images of Britney Spears, which averages out to 8.6 images per magazine. Considering the amount of news and popular media available for magazine coverage, the fact that Britney Spears was featured so much even through a brief hiatus shows her star power and her ability to be a fashion leader. Of the images analyzed, the following patterns and looks emerged:

OUTFITS THAT CONTAINED:	# OF TIMES
MIDRIFF (AREA BELOW THE CHEST AND ABOVE THE HIPS)	28
LINGERIE AS OUTERWEAR (BRAS, GARTERS, CORSETS, ETC).	24
ITEMS WORN:	
JEANS	23
MINI-DRESSES (CUT BELOW THE KNEE)	19
TANK TOPS	19
T-SHIRTS	15
LONG GOWNS (FULL LENGTH)	14
SKIRTS	9

These outfits and their corresponding parts allow the public an opportunity to partake with Spears or pass. The discourses of fashion try to make garments correspond to what we want to express about ourselves, the complex role we want to

play in society (Barthes, 1985:44). Through the usage of semiotic content analysis, one can then gain insights into how Britney fits and challenges, changes or upholds fashion conventions that have been established in our culture. One can determine if her fashions normalize certain looks and what impact this has on the mass public. Roland Barthes' *Fashion System* (1983) helps break down Spears' look into a series of codes. However, Barthes' analysis has proven to be a semiological disaster because although clothing can be treated like a language with acceptable and unacceptable practices, it is NOT a language but a form of acknowledged repetition in the minimum step of the game of language and culture (Barnard, 2002:96). Nonetheless, this conception opens up for us "a space within which specific manifestations of repetition-practice can be located as manifestations of a complex cultural game, into which play a variety of social and psychic forces" (Middleton, 1990:290). As Francoise Simon-Miller states, "Clothing is the equivalent of a language – an institution, a set of conventions with structured, pre-established meanings; a fashion statement, on the other hand, is the equivalent of a speech act through the selection and combination process it entails" (1985:80).

Thus, clothing and fashion are analytically distinguished in that clothing provides a structure, a set of pre-established signs that uphold a particular social institution, while fashion (speech) tends to be an individual act presenting certain messages depending on the selection and combination of items. The two are always linked, as are language and speech, but the fashion cycle changes far faster than modes of speech, causing one to dissect and constantly re-understand and then reinterpret various clothing codes.

Even if clothing is in fact always organized as a general sign system, the system's meanings are not stable; they evolve and disappear at the mercy of history.

Flugel states that new fashions

if they are to be successful, must be in accordance with certain ideals current at the time that they are launched. Women, in particular must see in the new fashion a symbol of an ideal that is before them - though of course, as with other symbols, there need be no conscious realization of its true significance. The fashions to be introduced must not be too remote from the sentiments and aspirations of the time (1950:152-153).

Following the steps of the fashion cycle (see chapter two), Britney provides innovations for the public and other stars to imitate. When Britney wears an article of clothing, it is not the equivalent of some other music star wearing that piece because Britney has emerged as a fashion leader.¹⁵ Britney provides enough innovation for the public to imitate and adopt as their own, leading to new re-inventions from other stars who seek the fashion leader status of Spears and criticism from others who want nothing to do with the ascribed look. Images, music and the body are essential to new cultural forms of expression such as style (Negus, 1996:17). Because Britney Spears' music is popular, one form of expression for the body is jeans that accentuate the midriff area, now commonly known as "low-rise" jeans.

Shelia Whiteley's interpretation of Roland Barthes' narratology shows how a series of codes – **the narrative, hermeneutic, semic, cultural and symbolic** – can construct a certain meaning (1997:260). The narrative code provides a common-sense knowledge of what is going on. Sequences are ordered within the narrative and we order the sequences in our mind to make sense of the narrative. **The hermeneutic code** poses and reposes questions. Information is gradually revealed, which stimulates

interest as we move towards the final resolution of the story. Frederic Jameson believes that in this code there lies a clue or symptom for some vaster reality that replaces the object's ultimate truth (1993:68). The **semic** code works at the level of signifier (denotation, connotation), while the **cultural code** is related to our narrative competence, how we pick up references, clues that are seeded into the text. Finally, the **symbolic code** pulls us into the system of textual relations, drawing on preconceived ideas, our "decoding" envelope (Hall, 2001), which are often based on our positioning in culture (e.g. black, white, male, female).

These codes can be applied to Britney Spears. Because Spears is on the cover of a large number of magazines, one comes to accept and tolerate her look (the narrative code). Spears is constantly discussed in mass media, often about her social activities, not her music or performances. Her look becomes ever-more present and intriguing in that her style choices perpetuate even more discussion (the hermeneutic code). This begs the question if these styles become synonymous with her, at times, questionable behaviour. When one sees a girl or young woman sporting her midriff and low-rise jeans, one can assess Spears' impact (the semic code) as through her image the code of the shy and asexual teenaged girl being is broken (the cultural code). Because of a shift in the cultural code, the symbolic code now constructs an accepted female image that is naughty-but-nice at the same time. The symbolic code changes preconceived notions as now females can show off their bodies through popular fashion and not be accused of dressing like exotic dancers or whores.

What transpires is that arbitrary signs are used to signify a particular status or position. Once it is agreed among a community of sign users that a particular look

will signify frivolity, or that career level will be signified by a particular style of skirt or suit, then a code has been established (Barnard, 2002:122). By means of this code, members can construct and communicate levels of status to themselves and to others. This system not only communicates gender and status but musical preferences and for die-hards, political ideologies as well. Using the codes seen in Spears, one can determine which are the syntagmatic (or spatial) units of the written garment and which are the systemic (or virtual) oppositions. A basic syntagmatic unit, which consists of a matrix relationship between object, support and variant, becomes a formula that distinguishes signature looks. Roland Barthes designed this system, which is one of the more valid units and modes he established (Barnard, 2002:97-99, Barthes 1983:59-60). For example, a key Britney look established from the content analysis would be low-rise jeans with the midriff exposed. The relationship therefore is: low-rise jeans/midriff/present = in fashion, "cool," as opposed to low-rise jeans/baggy shirt/midriff absent \neq out of fashion, "uncool." Low-rise jeans equals the object which receives signification, present/absent is the variant which constitutes signification and midriff supports the signification.

Spears becomes a fashion sign for the prevailing styles of the time because she is not a symbol that can easily be categorized. Britney Spears is released from being a symbol, but serves rather as a symptom as she becomes a way of speaking (Garber, 2000:5). Britney attains uber-star status when she can announce to *W* magazine, a fashion magazine, that she lost her virginity, and not to *Rolling Stone*, a music magazine.¹⁶

Spears is an interpretant whereby the sign-user evaluates or responds to what the sign means socially, contextually, personally, etc. (Sebok, 2001:6). This is Charles Peirce's notion that every sign determines an interpretant which is itself a sign so that we have a sign overlying a sign (Sebok, 2001:34). This causes Britney to be more complex than a sign, symbol or icon. Rather, Spears becomes a "compulsive, automatic, non-arbitrary sign, such that the signifier coupled with the signified in the manner of a natural link" (Sebok, 2001:46). An example that Britney is a symptom is for thong underwear showing out from under low-rise jeans.¹⁷ These jeans now become an index for Britney as the index becomes "a sign which refers to the Object it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object" (Peirce, 1935-66:305). The notion of midriff cannot be disassociated from Spears even though other artists such as Shania Twain and the Spice Girls contributed to this look.¹⁸ Spears manages to keep a paradigmatic structure intact whereby her looks are distinguished and differentiated from all other signs of the same kind, notably other music stars. The public manages to recognize these changes quite rapidly, as Sebok (2001:8) states

clearly, a text bears no meaning unless the receiver of the text knows the code(s) from which it was constructed and unless the text refers to, occurs in, or entails some specific context. The context is the environment – physical, psychological, and social – in which a sign or text is used or occurs.

Mass media continually provide numerous commentaries on Spears' appearance. Out of the forty magazines, thirty-six captions specifically dealt with Spears' appearance or discussed another star in relation to her appearance. For example, a caption accompanying a photo of singer Alicia Keys read, "Two more sit-

ups and I'll look like Britney." Spears also receives many comments about her image often involving a pun of one of her song titles, such as "Oops! Britney cropped it again." Not only does Spears dictate a certain look, but the word Britney itself signifies various characteristics with respect to appearance. One must pay reference to the synchronic dimension of analysis, which is the study of signs at a given point in time, normally the present, and the diachronic dimension, which investigates how signs change in form and meaning over time (Sebok, 2001:5). The study of these magazines highlights how Britney's image is primarily developed from the clothing that she wears.¹⁹

Me Against the Music? Is Anybody Listening or Just Gawking? Fashion as Music Analysis

As much as one discusses Spears' image, her music plays a factor in her image and the way image and music are treated; the way in which they are combined will determine the mode of interpellation/listening and, consequently, the mode of dress. Richard Middleton notes four key points in the construction of subjectivity in popular music: *emotion*; *syntagmatic structure*, which provides time-awareness with the narrative or lyrics, *character roles*, defined by social category, gender, class and so on and by the personality type with which listeners can identify; and, finally, *bodily participation*, the invitation to map, trace, fill out, the patterns of movement offered by the rhythmic structure and texture (1990:250). Spears is successful in combining and unifying all of these points. The syntagmatic structure in Spears' videos and

songs is always a balance between being a female in control and at the mercy of somebody else, noted by Bradford:

Spears' 1999 "Baby One More Time" involves a narrative in which the female narrator complains about her loneliness, which is occasioned by her lover's failure to page her. In her "Stronger" a playful allusion is made to the earlier song with the assertion that the narrator is "stronger than yesterday," no longer dependent on the presence of her lover for her sense of self- like many anti-romance songs (2003:33).

Every "Slave 4 U" video, in which Spears pushes her own boundaries, is countered with a "Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman" video, where she sings touchy lyrics over a lush panoramic landscape. For every "Toxic," where Spears acts a superhero, there is a sensitive ballad in "Everytime" where Spears attempts a suicide due to the pressures of life. Any of her sexual or other antics are excused, for this nebulous state of transition-hood is a time for mistakes and exploration. Said Spears of the song "Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman"

I'm really just coming into my own and becoming the person I want to be. I don't even know who I am right now, you know? I just am. The song says that there are days when you just cry because nothing is going right and you don't feel good about yourself. But the bottom line is everything's going to be okay, because you're going to find the inner strength to figure yourself out. We all go through it. (quoted in Williams, 2003:48)

Therefore, Britney can get married in Las Vegas for twenty-four hours, be accused of doing cocaine, go on massive party binges, shop hopelessly away, be romantically linked to Jared Leto, Ben Affleck, Fred Durst, Colin Farrell, John Cusack and marry one of her backup dancers who has two children from a previous marriage and it is all

okay because it is premised under the rubric of trying to figure out what adulthood really is.²⁰

A reason why all of these events get so much coverage is that Spears is still thought of as a innocent, pure girl which appeals to males and females. The ideology of innocent girls, the notion of the unmarried post pubescent girl as intrinsically innocent and without sexual interest has been supplanted by recognition of her sexual interests (Nathanson, 1991). As adolescence is a cross roads for girls (hence Spears's movie title) – it is a time of crisis when girls become uncertain of what they know and can speak, a time when girls confront new prescriptions about their responsibility to themselves and to others and rules about knowledge and understanding that may be publicly expressed but may not be knowledge based on their own experience and interaction. Spears' gives her fans the right to be confused about growing up in the world – at a time when girls are supposed to realize their femininity and how to handle their sexuality. The girls may not know how to act but Spears acts as a buffer zone, like an older sister, showing them what they could be doing, even though they may not be doing any of these actual practices yet secretly wishing to.

Spears works at this mythic level because, as Barnard states

it is the function of denotation to naturalize connotation, to make it appear as if it has always been this way and this is the effect of the rhetoric of the image; ideology is the process in which the work of culture is presented to be understood as the work of nature (2002:96).

Spears becomes the ideal school class president who defines what actions are appropriate. Her music, dancing, behaviour and style eventually become accepted. Her image now bears certain meaning that alters popular culture. These shifts happen

gradually as icons manage their ideologies (and people's representations of them) to grow and evolve. As they develop, more of their features simply become accepted. Spears has normalized such looks as sporting her midriff, wearing low-rise jeans and having her underwear showing. In "Outrageous," Spears sings about "her sexy jeans" and "my shopping spree." In "Brave New Girl," she sings about looking good, "in those low-rise jeans and sexy baby-tee." However, these looks cannot be established solely by music or solely by fashion. The two work together in symbiosis to perpetuate a myth and contribute to what is considered "natural" in the style of popular fashion. However, the task of criticism is not to show how performers articulate a predefined ideology, but to trace the way sexuality is constructed by the performing conventions themselves, which lies ultimately in what people wear, by the responses they compel listeners to make (Frith, 1990:421).

Spears is a vital contributor to fashion because she has changed three major signifieds and still remains current in today's rapid-turnover music industry. As the findings of the semiotic content analysis demonstrate, Spears' image and her music are responsible for three key shifts in popular culture: the creation and definition of the "bad" and "good" girl, the notion of porno-chic and, most importantly, a hyper-consumption world. While all of these to some degree deal with gender and sexuality and there is always a moral panic brewing around her every move, the last feature has a far longer-lasting impact than females trying to sexualize their bodies.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

¹ As indicated in chapter two, one of the reasons the subculture models are outdated is that very few members of any subculture exclusively listen to only one genre of music. Numerous alternative or non-mainstream acts admit to listening to Spears. Bloc Party, in an interview in the March 2005 edition of *Interview Magazine* (pg.180), state "...Why can't I listen to Britney Spears and Sonic Youth?...Why can't I listen to what I want to listen to because it gives me pleasure?"

The April 2005 edition of *Chart Magazine* (pgs.46-48) – a Canadian music magazine that focuses on alternative and non-mainstream acts, dissected all of Spears' videos in terms of body shots and self/cultural references. For a magazine that specializes in promoting new music and acts, including a feature on Spears shows that she is a part of every subculture.

² <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/TECH/internet/01/05/google.list/index.html>

<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/TECH/internet/12/13/lycos.search/index.html>

³ <http://edition.cnn.com/2000/TECH/computing/12/21/britney.wins.idg/index.html>

⁴ <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/SHOWBIZ/11/26/showbuzz/index.html>

⁵ <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/SHOWBIZ/Movies/03/02/list.forbes.100/index.html>

⁶ http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/_/id/6959138/prince?pageid=rs.ArtistArticles&pageregion=mainRegion

⁷ Spears is the best-selling artist of the past five years – outselling the likes of Madonna, Celine Dion, Whitney Houston, Dido and Kylie Minogue. (24 hours news service, pg. 6, January 6th, 2005). The August 2004 edition of *Q-The Ultimate Rock 'N' Roll Magazine* places Spears as the seventeenth most important person in music today (pg.196).

⁸ Her image became readily available to appropriate by retailers through the slew of books and magazines solely devoted to Spears. In *Britney Spears Stylin!* (Maggie Marron, 1999, Warner Books), the book dissects all of Spears' various trademarks, such as a tied-up sporty shirt, hip huggers and cropped top. In *Britney - Every Step of the Way* (Felicia Culotta, 2000, Onyx) there is a collection of photographs of Spears trying on clothing and getting ready in various outfits for various awards shows and videos. These books are cookbooks, providing many recipes for a vast array of females from teens to adults to attain one of her looks. Bauer Publishing also puts out *LifeStory*, which is a full magazine devoted to getting to know a star. Spears had at least three full editions put out before Bauer switched to putting out editions for Avril Lavigne, Hillary Duff and, most recently Jessica Simpson.

⁹ Men's magazines incorporate the topic of Britney Spears whenever they can. When interviewing Jack Nicholson, the question was posed, "What would it be like to fuck Britney Spears?" Nicholson's response was "I can answer that question monumental: Life altering!" (pg. 90 *Esquire* February 2004). The fact that Spears is connoted with "fucking" and not making love or even having sex shows that she provides an equal amount of pleasure to men as she does to her female fan base.

¹⁰ Of course Britney Spears was not the first artist to appropriate aspects of black musical styles. Spears and other white dance stars such as Madonna commonly use black women

rappers' public displays. Their performances are another example of the African Americanization of American popular culture. See Herman, Gray. (1995) "Jamming on the One! Some Reflections on the Politics of Black Popular Culture," in Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness." Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp147-161.

¹¹ *Blender Magazine* (March 2004) dubbed this the sexiest moment in TV history. Her "...Baby One More Time Video" placed sixth and the Madonna kiss, twenty-third.

¹² Lindsay Lohan, one of the teens on the *Vanity Fair* cover, was featured on the cover of *W* magazine in the 2005 Spring issue. The rise of a fashion queen begins.

¹³ Readers' Picks Best Dressed: 1. Britney Spears 2. Gwen Stefani 3. The Hives (February 6, 2003 pg. 40)

¹⁴ Spears also appropriated another icon – Elvis. On the poster and DVD cover of her HBO Las Vegas concert, she is sporting a sequined rhinestone body-suit reminiscent of what "the King" wore in his performances.

¹⁵ As a fashion leader, short skirts are known as "Britney skirts" and there are an equal amount of Britney haters. (Step, Sessions Laura "Britney hating now the latest pop sensation" The Washington Post in Toronto Star, November 25 2003: C5)

¹⁶ *W* is a high fashion magazine and Spears finally revealed that she had sex with Justin Timberlake of N'SYNC. (August 2003, pg.126.)

¹⁷ The height of thong underwear sales were in 2002 according to popular lingerie retailer Frederick's of Hollywood. The boy short was increasing in popularity in 2004. Spears was wearing this type of undergarment for her last *Rolling Stone* cover. http://www.usatoday.com/life/lifestyle/2004-01-28-boy-shorts_x.htm.

Victoria's Secret, a popular intimate apparel store, has maintained successful sales in 2002/2003, launching specific lines targeted to particular demographics such as Pink – geared toward college girls and dorm life, who as teens grew up with the popular Spears thong look. http://money.cnn.com/2004/07/30/news/fortune500/victoria_college/?cnn=yes

¹⁸ Covers such as *Rolling Stone's* February 6 issue with Twain sporting a tied up AC/DC shirt with her midriff showing and a small-mini skirt is an essential example.

¹⁹ An example of this would be the tagline on the cover of *Inside Entertainment*, November 2003. "Britney Spears: She is reinventing herself as a purring sex kitten, but could not care less about being in fashion." Titles like these infer Spears' fashion presence.

²⁰ Magazines such as *US Weekly*, *People Magazine* and *Star* commonly link a Spears romance to various celebrities.

Chapter Five – Just Because I’m Sexy, Does Not Mean I Want Sex. I May Want a Pair of Prada Shoes Instead: Music Icons as Popular Practice

Britney Spears’ image became fashionable because she provided balance between looking naughty and being nice – just because she wore a baby-tee did not connote that she desired sex. This perpetual contradiction resonated with women as these fashions provided an avenue to show off sensuality that was not simply for the pleasure of men. Spears conveys an image of behaving badly – partying, dressing provocatively, rebelling against school-girl restrictions and buying her way to the top. Yet, she still manages to have characteristics of wholesomeness – caring for others, being charitable and maintaining solid relationships with her family¹ Through their image in music, print and visual texts, the Spice Girls constructed a particular feminine space, representing models for adoration, inspiring young girls’ fantasies, providing legitimization for various modes of rites of passage into the world of femininity (Lemish, 2003:17). Spears uses this right of passage to offer a message of empowerment, confidence and independence, as

the sensible woman of today has little enthusiasm for “weak” traits such as subservience and timidity and so the meaning of ‘femininity’ now is just a swishy kind of glamour – and ideally is just a masquerade, utilized by a confident woman who somehow is supposed to know exactly what she’s doing (Gauntlett, 2002:12).

If the Madonna phenomenon suggests that in a postmodern image culture, identity is constructed through image and fashion involving one’s look, pose and attitude (Kellner, 1994:176), Britney Spears provides a type of hyper-femininity known as pink-think which is “a set of ideas and attitudes about what constitutes proper female behavior” (Peril, 2002:7). She uses the pink-think concept to toy with pre-conceived

notions of female behaviour, such as timidity and acting prim and proper. Douglas Rushkoff, in *Merchants of Cool*, (Frontline, PBS, 2001) notes that this look gives girls the confidence and courage to develop an attitude of “I am midriff hear me roar.” Britney Spears uses her body and her clothing to convey a sort of personal girl space. However, as time progressed, she tried to shed those ties by daring to be more and more provocative with her public appearances. But for every saucy action such as the Madonna kiss noted previously, there was a wholesome cover for *Glamour* Magazine or an apology in *Seventeen* excusing her actions.²

Spears has shown how one can be sexy and not slutty, even while exposing one’s ass from out of one’s pants as she is in a different category. She is a temptress (Billinghurst, 2003:168). This dichotomy poses problems for parents and others who do not try and understand the complexity of girlhood. Mass media thrives on such moral panics, as stories regarding dress code are common newsworthy items. An excerpt includes:

Randia Cardia, who lives in Manhattan and has two teenage daughters, described a majority of the clothes offered for them as “hookerwear.” “There are a lot of us out there that are just appalled that someone hasn’t taken a stand,” Candia says – a stand against what she called “disgusting role models” such as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera... “It’s normal to see these 12-year old or younger girls trying to be Britney and Christina, with their pierced bellybuttons, their tiny little tube tops, their strappy shoes and their shorts (showing the tops of their buttocks).” (Trebay, *NY Times* reproduced in Sat ,September 6, 2003 *Toronto Star*).³

Spears’ image of sexuality pushes the envelope, but she lets others do most of her dirty work for her, as other artists either push the boundaries one step further or react against the Britney look. Andsager and Roe note that using sexuality as metamorphosis is designed to create the illusion that an artist has evolved into a

different being, generally a more mature and edgier version of his or her former self (2003:88). They stress that this metamorphosis often surrounds sexuality, not maturity, however. This phenomenon is witnessed in music stars Christina Aguilera and Avril Lavigne. It is not the case that fashion and clothing simply reflect an already existing sex and gender identity, but that they are “part of the process by which attitudes to and images of both men and women are created and reproduced” (Rouse, 1989:108, quoted in Barnard, 2002:117). And these three music stars – Spears, Aguilera, Lavigne – drive these attitudes and images with Britney in the middle of the fashion spectrum between whore, slut and punk. Britney is the ball in the middle of a pendulum that the other two stars want to knock out. Yet, Britney keeps swinging back, as she is part of a cultural matrix that can only be broken by shock and dissolution (Barnard, 2002:267). These shocks come in other syntagmatic relationships with other music stars trying to gain their ground.

Friends or not, Spears’ rival is Christina Aguilera. If Britney sponsors Pepsi, Aguilera sponsors Coke. If Britney attends a Versace fashion show, it is Aguilera who will be the new face of Versace.⁴ If Britney dates Justin Timberlake, Aguilera goes on tour with him. Aguilera gained a lot of press over her new image, notably the extreme lack of clothing, with the release of her *Stripped* album and the video “Dirrty.” Aguilera is regularly featured in magazines such as *CosmoGirl* defending her image with comments like

Ricky Martin is pouring hot wax down a naked girl and gyrating, and the public says, it’s sexy, and he’s hot. In another video, he’s basically having an orgy in a shower with guys and girls touching themselves and nobody says anything! But when a girl wears a short skirt, or if I’m in a

video shaking my hips it's jaw-dropping. (Aguilera quoted in Kuster, March 2003, pg.125).

Susan McClary (1991) warns that, when women employ the same musical styles and strategies as men, “masculine” elements are likely to be put down as too aggressive and feminine elements will be dismissed as trivial. However, unlike Madonna, who uses video to challenge preconceived gender roles, Aguilera’s video is simply a hyper-parody of Spears’ “Slave 4 U”; instead of putting herself in control Aguilera simply exploits herself. Her video tries to out-do “Slave 4 U” in its raw sexuality. In Spears’ video, she is in some sort of studio space sweating with her midriff exposed, tight jeans and is dancing seductively with her backup dancers. The entire performance relates to the concept of being a slave to the music or to yourself. Aguilera’s video plays upon all of these concepts but takes it to a disturbing level. In her video, she is at an underground boxing event, drenched in her underwear and chaps and her dance moves are almost all grinding somebody or something. What’s hotter than being a slave? Being dirty. If Spears is going to set the standard, than other artists’ are going to make sure they will out top it. The difference is that Britney, from the opening shot is the focus point of her video while Aguilera is doing anything, and absolutely anything trying to gain that focus.

While Aguilera’s record sales have been adequate, the resultant backlash against her image, even from her fans, has caused what Malcolm Gladwell has called the “Tipping Point,” which he defines as a “moment of great sensitivity where ordinary and stable phenomena change and have great consequences” (2000:12). The switch from sexy to slutty occurred with the release of Aguilera’s “Dirrty” video and

her various photo spreads in *Maxim* and *Rolling Stone*. Aguilera's video and image of being in chaps and lingerie and gyrating in a boxing ring pushed the boundaries enough for her fans and the media to seek something completely new from Britney.⁵ Spears was always on the boundary, wavering between good girl and slut. Because of Aguilera's new video and image, the boundary has been clearly drawn – she has now been labeled the slut and Spears is again her sole reference point.

Aguilera seems like the jealous sister who wanted to desperately to outdo/upstage her, and in the process alienated some of her female fans but gained male appreciation, a key component of the slut characteristic where “no man would put up with them in bed, no woman would want to be their friend” (Bright, 1999:79). Spears toyed with the slut idea. However, when Christina went full out, it made females realize that maybe toying with the slut identity is not all that it is meant to be. Aguilera also got engaged, married and kissed Madonna yet there was very little hoopla in mass media concerning those events. Aguilera built upon notions of perceived immoral behaviour that the fact that a “slut” kissed Madonna and married a record executive would be expected and therefore is a non-event. As for Britney, her shenanigans were newsworthy as they always seemed unfathomable – *there's no way Britney could of done that, she's so good!*

Young women and girls interviewed by ethnographic researchers expressed anxiety about the bodies of music stars and were engaged in a serious struggle to negotiate the bodies of young, female pop stars in their play (Baker, 2002:29). Another example from ethnographic research prior to Aguilera's new image places Spears in the slut category:

The most striking early event in every conversation was a very strong reaction to teenage pop sensation Britney Spears, *Rolling Stone's* crowned "Teen Queen." As soon as one girl mentioned her name, the others would jump into the conversation, and, with excited, raised voices, rip Ms. Spears to shreds:

[Emily, who had left the room briefly, enters.]

Anne: We're talking about Britney Spears.

Emily: She's slutty!

Rachel [to Melanie]: Did you see the pictures in *Rolling Stone*? She looks really trashy.

Anne: Slore!

Brenda: Slore!

Anne and Brenda: Slore slore slore slore slore slore whore!

Melanie: Is that a new word?

Anne: Slut and whore together! [laughing]

"Slut," "Whore," and "Slore" (an elision of slut and whore) were the first words out of their mouths. There was no such reaction to Christina Aguilera, another teenage pop star, or to Brandy, Monica, or Maya. The hunks in 98° and heartthrob Justin Timberlake of 'N Sync were neither here nor there. For these girls, Britney Spears is a tough and touchy subject (Lowe, 2003:125).

It seems that there is a very fine line between sexy and slutty but whatever that line is, it should not be crossed. The emergence of Avril Lavigne as the next fashion leader in 2003, showed that the stock in sluts was declining, although she could not completely burst the Britney bubble by 2005. While Lavigne had success before Aguilera, Lavigne's image of chain belts, workwear and neckties became a staple look only after the buzz of the "Dirrty" video. Media sources dubbed her an anti-Britney⁶ with her tank-tops, skateboard and general rough look. Lavigne's image was predicated on punk – chains, work clothes and her famous trademark tie - all strong notions of bricolage revolting against the current pop agenda:

Lavigne says her initial marketing campaign was "too pop," and she harbors particular disdain for those stylists who tried to make her look like Mandy Moore or Jessica Simpson: "That is like so sellout." Today, she

dresses in cutoff plaid bondage pants, steel-toed Doc Martens and a Dickies jacket with a button that reads f---fashion. (Ali, 2003:*Newsweek*).

The tie, known to symbolize the corporate male-dominated working world, has been co-opted as a fashion statement for women. Lavigne challenged any preconceived feminine notions and showed that she could rock with the boys as she used elements of dress and style to reject a social agenda (Rubinstein, 1995:13). Lavigne's syntagmatic matrix relationship includes tank top/tie/present = cool, tank top/midriff/present = uncool. Tank top equals the object that receives signification, present/absent is the variant that constitutes signification and midriff/tie supports the signification.

The notion of an anti-Britney is interesting, as Britney, not only connotes a certain look, but also a certain way of behaving. Magazines kept revealing Spears' actions on a weekly basis so that it was impossible to not include discussion about her in routine conversation. Even if one was not a fan of Spears, some sort of opinion could be formed about her, because it was easy to know what she was doing, what she was wearing and her next plan of attack. So if the teen market was not talking Britney and the if the adults were not wearing Britney, they were dissing Britney.⁷ Darren Haggar won the Coupe International Design Competition in Toronto by submitting a series of documentary photographs of defaced billboard posters for her "Live in Las Vegas" tour. The posters, with Spears in an Elvis-inspired one-piece jeweled costume, were defaced with comments such as "Please Cum on My Face" and arrows pointing to her breasts with "Real/Fake" written on them.⁸

Spears and Aguilera became replaced for a short while as Lavigne was seen as real and in style.⁹ Angela McRobbie notes that disapproving mass media coverage legitimizes and authenticates youth cultures, although in this case this is hardly subcultural (2000:186). However, the same formula exists with a twist. In the standard subculture model, a scene is transformed into a movement and what gets amplified are not only deviant activities, but also the records, haircuts and dance styles that are said to accompany them. In this case, the deviant activity results from fashion. Spears' look almost became uncool because Aguilera pushed the look so far that it had to do a 180-degree turn. However, the Spears' paradigm continued to work, albeit for someone else. After Lavigne's *Saturday Night Live* performance, in which she wore a Napanee Home Hardware T-shirt, 7000 new shirts were printed and 2000 were sold in a week.¹⁰ The muscle shirt replaced the midriff shirt. As Susanne Heller noted

there is a ray of hope for beleaguered parents who are sick of the hoochie look: Britney Spears is out and the much less slutty Avril Lavigne is way in. That means teen fashion is less about bare bellies and ultra-low waisted jeans and more about military cargo pants with lots of pockets, studded belts and combat boots (*National Post*, Saturday August 30, 2003, SP6).

No matter which style no matter which star (as Spears, Aguilera and Lavigne have used the same songwriters and music video directors), the differences, if there are any, are purchased in the same place – the malls as opposed to the streets. Street culture is now shopping culture but the results end up the same as distinctions are made to what is cool and what sucks. Just as the practice of tattooing has lost its traditional transgressionary qualities since it has become a widely circulated practice in consumer culture, the notion of such style authenticities are not important

(Bengtsson, Ostberg, Kjeldgaard 2005:263). What is considered authentic now depends on which star is wearing what and at times, more importantly what they are not wearing. Midriff t-shirts, piercings on various body parts, cargo pants and getting a brand like the Nike swoosh as a tattoo are simply style markers. The original source of where the style came from is not as important as long as you can properly reflect the star in question or oppose them completely.

In the case of Spears, two opposing audiences emerge – one that is pro-Britney and the other anti-Britney. But it is not only the audience who take a stance, but other stars do as well – either by singing about a Britney backlash or by joining in. Live On Release had a single “I’m Afraid of Britney Spears,” showcasing their distaste of Britney. Pink had the hit single “Don’t Let Me Get Me” with the line, “Tired of being compared to damn Britney Spears. She’s so pretty, that just ain’t me.” Pink calls for an audience who does not aspire to have mainstream connotations of prettiness. Rufus Wainwright in “Vibrate” sings “I try to dance Britney Spears I guess I’m getting on in years.” Fountains of Wayne did a cover version of “Baby...One More Time” that their record label wanted to release as a single.¹¹ Other stars who were not typically dance-pop adapted to the Britney paradigm – Jewel’s release, *0304*, was heavily dance/pop inspired instead of her usual folk connotations. Sheryl Crow’s new look was in line with Spears’ look with her midriff exposed at every opportunity. Liz Phair, known for her subversive sexual lyrics, used Lavigne’s and Spears’ songwriters The Matrix on her major label debut, making her songs far less aggressive and more radio-friendly. These types of oppositions produce changes in the fashion cycle and

then these styles are the fashions that become available in hybridized states in retail environments.

It should be noted that as much as Lavigne had an impact on mass fashion, her first release only sold as much as Spears' third album.¹² While Lavigne is perceived to be tough and in control, she could not slay the Britney machine with her tanktops, high tops and cargo pants. Britney's *Greatest Hits* release was still in demand, showing her true star status. Spears managed to Britnify the Lavigne trademarks as in her first video release from *In The Zone*, "Me Against The Music," she is wearing a tie, in turn subverting Lavigne's own subversion. Now there were two distinct looks that merged in 2004 with the fashion style consisting of tanktops with the midriff showing, low-rise jeans and studded belts.¹³ Lavigne also managed to succumb to the force of Britney in 2005. While Lavigne's first *Rolling Stone* cover used Spears' school girl plaid skirt in a punk style, Lavigne showcased a midriff and flowing hair for her 2005 cover of *Cosmopolitan* and eventually posed for *Maxim* magazine. Lavigne and Britney both use their perceived notions of femininity to address a certain type of audience through the same medium. As Lowe states

in the end, Spears escapes the "whore" tag not because fans or the media dub her attire inappropriate or her behavior raw, but largely because she affects "innocent" at the same time. ...the frustration and anger they feel on account of these conflicting Britneys reflect that there is deeper dilemma for today's early adolescent girls—the main consumers of teen pop: their feminist consciousness colliding with a postfeminist culture (2003:125).

One may not be a fan of either Lavigne or Britney but the fashion market is left to choose from these two main looks. One does not have to enjoy the music of Spears to show a midriff nor wear a studded belt to enjoy Lavigne, but this is the

ultimate paradox inherent in the relationship between music and fashion – the look may be in style because of the artist, but the artist may still be cursed for it or for other aspects of their career. Lavigne complains that “Britney Spears bugs me more than Christina does....I think she’s taken it a little too far and she tries a little too hard” (Stevenson, 2004:E4). As long as this clash and construct exists, it is the major reason why these stars are symptoms, as they create attitudes and opinions not only from their songs, but from their styles as well.

Britney as Porno-chic

Spears’ clothing styles have made pornographic tendencies much more recognized and acceptable in mainstream culture.¹⁴ The image of the schoolgirl, Spears’ first style uniform, has been mimicked, parodied and misused in a variety of sexual settings.¹⁵ Spears does not represent pornography per se, but rather, as Brian McNair labels it, porno-chic:

This is not porn, but the representation of porn in non-pornographic art and culture; the pastiche and parody of, the homage to and investigation of porn; the postmodern transformation of porn into mainstream cultural artifacts for a variety of purposes. Where porn stars are usually anonymous (...or have pseudonyms...), porno-chic is celebrity-led. Where pornography is ‘real’ – the sex it shows is really happening – porno-chic is staged, and if not staged, then sanitized to remove its graphic rawness (2002:60).

An example would be Spears’ heaving bosom in her effigy at Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum in London. Whereas bricolage is concerned with creating new meanings, the pastiche or parody that is porno-chic is concerned with heightening

established meanings of sex and sexuality, no matter the patriarchal tendencies involved.¹⁶

The pornography industry has capitalized on this good girl/bad girl construct: titles such as *Naughty College School Girls* appear to be popular, since this series is in its thirty-second edition.¹⁷ In these videos, each girl initially appears in a white shirt and plaid skirt and then proceeds to have sex. There are porn stars by the names of Britney Spears and Britney Rears who take on the characteristics of the real Britney, as Rears' bio states, "she is a fun loving blond who does what most young girls do at that age. Going to the mall, hanging out with friends and having as much sex as possible are simple pleasures enjoyed by this southern California cutie" (www.britneyrears.com). Others simply look similar to Spears such as Britney Skye, Alyssa Lovelace, Teagan Presley and Austin O'Reily. *Playboy's* fiftieth anniversary Playmate of the Year, Colleen Shannon, bears a strong resemblance to Spears. Because of this notion of youthful sexuality, teen sex websites have proliferated, all teetering between this good/bad dichotomy. Websites such as pecahez18.com and lightspeedgirls.com have characteristics that are found in Spears' repertoire such as suggestive semi-nude poses in settings such as a child's bedroom or clubbing.¹⁸

Porno-chic is represented in the wardrobe used in Spears' concerts and in her photos with photographers such as David LaChapelle and Mark Liddell. The first *Rolling Stone* cover of Spears in a push-up bra and underwear in a child's room helped create this image. Other *Rolling Stone* covers have depicted Spears in an American flag halter top; in a bra and with her underwear peeking out of jeans; in a short blue blouse and ripped jeans with her full midriff showing; and, the most recent

one where she is topless, pressed against a door with a white blouse covering her breasts and dressed only in white boy-short panties with pink trimming. Christina Aguilera's covers have been similar, but slightly harder. For *Rolling Stone*, she posed nude with an electric guitar and then with Justin Timberlake, Britney's ex-boyfriend. Common porno-chic images come from magazine covers featuring Aguilera and Spears. These images then become contested by Lavigne. Common characteristics and porno-chic tendencies are indicated in the following table profiling three magazine covers picked at random with Aguilera, Spears and Lavigne on the cover.

Artist	Magazine	Look	Relation to porno-chic
Christina Aguilera	<i>Nylon</i> August 2003	White-tanktop, jeans	Button of jeans undone and flap open
	<i>CosmoGirl</i> March 2003	Red cap, cross necklace, tanktop	Bra exposed out of tank-top
	<i>ElleGirl</i> February/March 2004	Black cap, cut-off T-shirt, mini-skirt	Black and white plaid skirt extremely short with lace over it
Britney Spears	<i>Q</i> Magazine December 2003	Green bra with mini white-tie in middle of cleavage, black shorts, biker gloves	Appropriation of biker chicks, lingerie as outer wear
	<i>Esquire</i> November 2003	White sweater, high heels, no pants	Paying homage to past sex symbols (e.g. Angie Dickinson)
	<i>GQ</i> November 2003	Men's undershirt cut below breasts, jean shorts unbuttoned	Placing heavy emphasis on female erogenous zone
Avril Lavigne	<i>YM</i> October 2002	Men's dress shirt untucked, black tie, spiked bracelet	Opposing traditional feminine clothing

	<i>CosmoGirl</i> June/July 2004	Black top, cross necklace	No cleavage exposed, classic style
	<i>Maxim</i> October 2004	Bustier with “Did You Think I Was Going To Give it Up To You?” inscribed on it	Lingerie as outerwear, sexual reference on clothing challenging the male dominant

As the content analysis in shows (see chapter four), the second most common item that Spears wears is forms of lingerie as outerwear. This is also how she is portrayed in magazine covers. For her Woman of the Year *Glamour UK* cover, she wore a white bra and low-rise white pants. For the North American edition she wore a light, white, strapless dress. In men’s magazines such as *Maxim’s Blender* she is wearing a leather jacket, green bra, low-rise jeans and green underwear showing. For *Arena* she wore a black slip. In the British *GQ* she is wearing a white cut-off tank top and mini-jean shorts and on the cover of *Q*, the title reads “Britney Gone Wild,” while *People* magazine ran the headline: “Britney Spears? Girl gone wild,” paying tribute to the popular *Girls Gone Wild* Series.

The whole conceit of *Girls Gone Wild* is premised on the idea of “females-out-of-control.” Various camera crews take video clips of college-aged young women, usually on vacation, who are asked to show their breasts.¹⁹ Spears’ image makes it normal for girls to use their bodies in highly sexualized ways. As low-rise jeans and thongs have emphasized the pubic area, shaving practices have become more common for women. Using Playboy Playmate centerfolds as an example, from 2003-2005, at least three of the playmates each year have had entire shaved pubic areas

with one of them, Carmella DeCesare, winning the Playmate of the Year award in 2004.

Porno-chic practices have not been shunned, but rather have been accepted. Lingerie stores such as La Senza now have a store for teens, LaSenza Girl, where their fashions are scaled down for a younger demographic. Abercrombie and Fitch produced *A&F Quarterly* (essentially a cross between a glossy magazine and a Christmas catalog), which featured more than one hundred pages of photographs depicting young-looking models posed in various stages of undress, individually and in groups. Porno-chic is not only witnessed in clothing but in other forms of popular culture, such as *Carmen Electra's Strip Aerobics*. This video is an exercise program that combines the art of stripping with aerobic exercises. Stripping has become an accepted practice, as obtaining this workout disc is as easy as buying any top-forty music purchase. Other stars now thrive off of porno-chic, whereas at one time a celebrity sex tape or nude photos could severely damage one's career and image, such as when it was discovered that former Miss America Vanessa Williams posed for *Penthouse* magazine. Nowadays, some sort of scandal is assumed. Paris Hilton and Pamela Anderson were virtually unscathed when private home videos of them having sex were released and made commercially available. For Hilton, the videotape made her even more newsworthy, and rather than appear flustered by the incident, she lapped it up with a best-selling book and appeared in a number of music videos, notably with Eminem. Music video then becomes a representation of porno-chic, as some artists not only release two versions of a single (clean lyrics and dirty), but two versions of the video (naughty and naughtier). When Nelly swipes a credit card down

a female's thong, this swipe is representative of how much money is involved in keeping porno-chic culture alive. Porno-chic involves the purchasing of many forms of seductive clothing and makeup and provides a party atmosphere, yet shies away from the actual act of sex. It is all about fantasy and having an attitude that one can be hot and sexy, and by avoiding nudity and actual sexual practice, the label of slut is almost avoided.

The popularization of porno-chic attire in teen magazines has forced some schools to enforce thong checks and monitor what students wear.²⁰ This practice has not necessarily been associated with an increase in pregnancy and declining morality; rather, it shows how forms of accepted clothing can lead to accepted practice.²¹ Flugel's (1950) concept of the shifting erogenous zone is applicable here, as the influence of Britney has shifted this zone from the breasts to the stomach and hip region. This shift has made it acceptable for girls to show their stomachs in public or show a part of their posterior region, but contradicts Judy K. Miler's claim that "all past erogenous zones have blurred together, resulting in the creation of an overall look that seems chic to the masses" (2004:1).

Magazines thrive on the notion of porno-chic as the vast market of American's men's magazines such as *FHM* or *Maxim* all hint at female nudity, but never in fact show it. This is the basis of Spears' ambivalent version of porno-chic (ambivalent because of her good girl/bad girl personas) – give them something to talk about, allude to, make them wish, reveal, but never enough to make a scene – let others do that. Although Spears has posed for *Esquire* and *Blender*, she has avoided the two most popular men's magazines, *FHM* and *Maxim*. In *Maxim*, Christina Aguilera posed

topless and semi-nude in various watery environments. These photos are the epitome of porno-chic – that one hand over the breast makes it acceptable and purchasable to a wide audience. *Maxim*, *Stuff* and *FHM* put out special supplements with their magazines entitled the “Hot 100,” “125 Sexiest Women of the Year” and “100 Sexiest Women in the World,” respectively. In 2003, Britney placed thirtieth in *Maxim*, in *Stuff* she placed second in the “awesome multitaskers” category and she placed second and third in the US and British editions of *FHM*. In 2004, she placed thirty-sixth in *Maxim*, fourth in *UK Maxim*’s “Bad Girls” category, fourteenth in *Stuff*’s “Hottest Women to Watch in 2004” and *FHM* dubbed her the sexiest woman in the world for the year 2004. But Spears was not even mentioned in the *FHM* top 100 list in 2005 indicating that the fashion cycle has started to change.^{22 23} Magazines such as *Celebrity Skin* have created an industry that shows partial glimpses of Aguilera’s and Spears’ bodies and countless websites all claim to have photos of Spears naked. Out twenty-four covers of *Celebrity Skin*, Spears has been featured on six of them.

Jacqueline Lambiase used qualitative content analysis to track sexualized images on the official web sites and fan sites of forty-one celebrities. Female musicians were more likely than other celebrities to be represented by sexualized images, and all types of female celebrities are more sexualized than males:

in general, a female celebrity who uses sexuality to promote her public image wears this sexuality like a uniform on both official and fan web sites. Celebrities with the most explicitly sexualized official identities were the women, particularly musicians such as Ashanti (web site copyrighted by Murder Inc.), Shakira (copyrighted by Sony Music), Britney Spears (copyrighted by Britney Online Inc.), and Jennifer Lopez (copyrighted by Sony Music). For the most part, they wore their sexuality like a uniform. When comparing sexualized images from these singers’ home pages to photos elsewhere on their Web sites, few contradictory

images were found (demure depictions were usually publicity photos from films starring these musicians) (Lambiase, 2003:70).

Spears created a culture where feminine sexuality is addressed directly by popular fashion. This culture has very little to with satisfying males, as the look is constructed by females under the premise of this is who I am. Sexuality becomes a representation of style (and consumer culture) just as much as rebellion was. Whether it is pop or punk, to be part of the culture one must buy into its key components. In the years prior to the Spice Girls, it was almost inappropriate to be sexy, or attractive; with the Spice Girls arrival, it became acceptable not only to be sexy, but to *buy* sexy, which is an even more significant trend for the purpose of this analysis than the pseudo-sexuality that girls are trying to achieve.

Britney, the Shop Tart – Friday April 18, 2003 *NY Post*

On slow news days, newspapers love to put Britney Spears on their covers. Out of all the world's events, what Spears is doing is sometimes the most newsworthy.²⁴ While she has been on many covers in regards to her performances and lifestyle, the *New York Post* thought it relevant to show that Britney shops. All "Britneys" shop, as the process of shopping is a key attribute to Spears' popularity.²⁵ Shopping is not just letting go of that magnetic swipe, but it also involves dressing up to go visit boutiques, trying on clothing, determining if an item suits you, trying to find something that is unique enough – yet still in style, comparison shopping between boutiques, taking breaks (usually with a latte), seeing what other people are wearing and justifying the purchase. Spears embraces a culture of consumption that in turn

helps the fashion industry and the economy in general (as for personal debt, that may be another story).

An industry produces culture and culture produces industry (Negus, 1999:10). Consumption is now a social relationship and, as Ewen and Ewen note the dominant one in our society (1992:54). Spears and her certified company, Britney Brands Inc., are an industry that produce a fashion culture of consumption based around porno-chic with a good girl / bad girl element. Ongoing cultural production involves working with recognizable codes, conventions and expectations. It entails putting together various audio and visual components in a recognizably familiar way. This production also entails the commercialization of the process that music stars have now accepted and embraced. It is not necessarily new, as the Elvis Presley Company once brought out a series of accessories for fans: Elvis perfume, scarves printed with his portrait, belts, jeans, hats, charm bracelets and lipsticks in shades named after favourite discs such as Hound-dog Orange, Heartbreak Hotel Pink and Tutti-Frutti Red were popular. The Elvis products were the beginning of the vogue for star-inspired accessories on which teenagers spent their incomes (Dorner, 1975:105). Similar to Elvis's company, merchandising company Britney Brands Inc. distributes Spears' own memorabilia such as calendars and posters and is the licensee for all of her other product endorsements.

However, instead of this company providing mere souvenirs of her aura, Britney involves the acceptance of the commercial aspects behind her persona. Britney Spears has been involved with the following companies in terms of brand sponsorship: Skechers, Pepsi, Polaroid, Tommy Hilfiger and Milk, as well as having her own

cosmetics line with Elizabeth Arden. What has been the major shift is that artist memorabilia has evolved from being a single souvenir item to a full-fledged fashion line.

Clothing company Tommy Hilfiger understood how the relationship between clothing and fashion could help boost sales. After becoming quite popular with the hip-hop community,²⁶ designer Hilfiger dubbed 1999 “The Year of Music,” signing Spears to a lucrative deal where, in conjunction with her tour, Tommy Jeans ran retail promotions with enter-to-win contests and radio promotions, along with Britney Spears’ personal appearances in select Tommy Jeans retail locations nationwide.²⁷ This ensured that Spears’ look could be easily purchased and not homemade.

The Pepsi-Cola Company has used music stars for at least two decades to promote its brands. However, unlike Madonna’s ad, which sparked controversy by using the song “Like a Prayer” (the original video featured a burning cross), Spears’ ads managed to promote not only her career, but her look as well. There were numerous commercials produced, such as the Era commercial in which Spears appears at a drive-thru that represents the 1950s, frolics on the beach in the 1960s, gets cast as a hippie in the 1970s, dresses in a suit in a 1980s take-off of Robert Palmer’s “Addicted To Love” video and then circles back to the modern-day diner. The 2001 Super Bowl ad is the one that combined advertising, music video, song and image into one hybridized form (Reichert, 2003:315). In the commercial, Spears is sporting her midriff and her belly button is pierced with Pepsi jewelry. The commercial’s premise is that various audiences are watching Spears perform and all are in a state of awe. However, no teens are watching her; rather, a group of male workers, a housewife and

even Bob Dole are used to make Spears appear as desirable, consumable and fashionable. And even when Spears had a falling out with Pepsi over drinking a Coke product, pop stars Shakira and Beyonce Knowles were there to hold the fort until Beyonce, Pink and Britney all appeared together in the 2004 Super Bowl Gladiator ad for Pepsi.

Spears' sponsorship with Skechers also soured but as usual, Christina Aguilera was soon picked up. Not surprisingly, the campaign was titled "Naughty and Nice" and was launched in August and September 2004 in international magazines, portraying the global superstar "pushing the envelope as a sexy pin-up style teacher, nurse and policewoman alongside herself as an equally provocative school girl, injured patient and street criminal" (<http://www.businesswire.com/cgi-bin/mmg.cgi?eid=4688640>).²⁸

Any idea of DIY (do it yourself) has now become BIY, "buy it yourself." Instead of creating music, musicians are increasingly becoming famous for recreating the logos and fashions of the brands they represent. Britney's commercial appeal induces a culture of shopping and consumption. The image is not created but purchased, and enough fashion outlets are willing to take care of the Britneys of the world. Even clothing companies that are not official sponsors of Spears profit indirectly from her look (more to be discussed in chapter six). The company Trashy Lingerie is mentioned by Spears in articles and her quotes in turn were posted on their website.²⁹ Spears' tanktop of choice? One that reads: trashy but still a virgin. All of Spears' key wardrobe attributes are left to mall retailers to keep the cycle going. And if Spears is unavailable or busy with another project, other artists such as Jessica

Simpson or Gwen Stefani will instead appear on the cover of style guides. For teens, websites such as delia.com make these styles acceptable and for older demographics, designer fare has the same features, showing that when a popular style emerges, it neither trickles up or down but becomes hybridized for a large cross-section of the population.

Lipovetsky discusses the second phase of modern fashion: optional and playful logic in which one chooses not only among different clothing lines, but also among the most incompatible principles of appearance (1994:106). In heteromorphic codes, everyone is invited to decompartmentalize styles, to blend them, to do away with stereotypes and copies, to abandon rules and fossilized conventions in a perpetual nondirectivity:

this open fashion marks the end of this uniform, disciplinary "central planning," the end of the unprecedented gap that had come to exist between innovation and diffusion, between the creative avant-garde and consumers. Where appearance is concerned, the public has acquired a heightened power to select and reject, a power that reflects the individualist escalation of the quest for personal autonomy (Lipovetsky, 1994:118).

While fashion is now in one sense open, it is far more narrow-minded as music stars, rather than other fashion leaders, direct the power of the popular look. The area of adoption and diffusion moves so fast that fashion "change agents" – (innovators, opinion-leaders) are music stars who lead fashion-conscious consumers into complementary roles displaying new styles and verbally influencing friends' choices. Snyder and Fromkin refer to this as a "uniqueness motivation model" in which, they suggest, that people compare themselves to others, searching for similarities and

differences and thus forming a self-identity (in Sproles, 1985:59). People seek some socially acceptable differences or “uniqueness attributes” compared to others, but only a moderate amount. This moderate amount lies in the brand that one seeks and the resultant purchase. The purchase may be different for Britney or Avril fans (although it may come from the same mall or even the same store), it is still based on an image derived from music.

Jackie Stacey notes how star styles displayed on the screen were quickly reproduced as lines of clothing in department stores' and the appearance of stars in magazines was also a crucial way of promoting fashionable styles (1994:82). Stars were primarily relegated to the cinema but with the advent of music video, this medium became the direct way for a music star to showcase their style. Brand knowledge is a major form of conversation and is a crucial element in teen culture's growing obsession with acquisition. With ongoing cultural production involving recognizable codes, Britney Spears represents a significant change with respect to the nature of sponsorship in relation to music stars. As Alissa Quart states

...in an inversion of the youth cult explosion of thirty years ago, when adults dressed in young styles, teens now aspire to dress as if they were women in their twenties. It is common for mothers and daughters in upper middle-class areas to wear the same expensive brand-name clothes. While the mother strives to look twelve years younger, the daughter strives to look twelve years older (2003:16).

This desire and quest for clothes and brands is not a new trend, but the conflation of the systems of the signature and brand name signal a profound shift from the fetishizing of a particular type of item – to an appreciation of the auteur-designer, a change made possible by the increase in disposable income and an ever-increasing

information base teenagers now possess (Collins, 2002:11). Although the brand is a corporate rather than personal signature, the two are merging ever more into one. Rather than going shopping for a style at the mall, shopping is now achieved through music stars, and the mall merely becomes a step in the process rather than the significant outlet for trends and fashions. Britney Spears' most important contribution – the convergence of music star as fashion leader/designer – is the basis of chapter six.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

¹ To compensate for some of Spears' flashier outfits, her mother is used to justify the look. In *Heart To Heart*, Spears' mother states about Spears' wardrobe, "But I don't see any real harm in it, and I don't believe that makes me a bad mother, either. People have criticized Britney for dressing a little too sexy for her age. Well, this is what I have to say to that: She dresses appropriately for where she's at and the business she's in" (Spears Britney and Lynn 2000, Three Rivers Press, New York, pg: 86). Spears' first own scrapbook, aptly titled *Stages* (2002, NVU Editions) discusses her relationships with her family, as Spears states "if you really want to understand who I am, you have to talk to the people who know me best: my parents, my siblings, my aunt and uncle, my best friend. They'll tell you that the Britney they see is nothing like her image." Interesting to note that Spears refers to her alter-persona Britney as if they are somehow split. It is also very hard to label Spears a true bad-girl when she acknowledges her friends and family as sources of support.

² Although *Cosmopolitan* named Spears Fun Fearless Female of the Year in 2002 and *Glamour Magazine* named Spears Woman of the Year in December 2003, by April 2004 Spears was apologizing in *Seventeen* for her briefly annulled marriage to Jason Allen Alexander. Spears can command attention from magazines for almost anything she does and magazines allow her an outlet to justify and regret her actions. As Spears states in the April 2004 *Seventeen* issue: "I don't condone the behaviour that I've had over the past year. I don't think there's an excuse. I just think sometimes you have wild spells, and you learn from that. But the things I did weren't very cool. I just wanted to put that out there" (pg.135). Spears apologizes in *Seventeen* to provide her younger female fans a connection to any mistakes they are going through. She also takes care of her older female fans in the April 2005 of *Allure*, as she once again goes over her troubles as the headline on the cover states: "The Truth and the Rumours."

³ Numerous articles in the popular press express the above sentiment. *Progress*, a Ukrainian Catholic Newspaper, addressed a whole issue to Britney Spears and her dressing too sexy, claiming that the "Britney Spears Syndrome," while fashionable for girls, causes lustful desires in males.

⁴ While Spears was Donatella Versace's one-time model and sat in the front row at her fashion show, six months later Aguilera became the new model in the Versace ad campaign. (*National Post*, A15, Thursday, March 6th, 2003). The *National Post* premised the news with the following excerpt showing that the Spears/Aguilera comparisons were popular conversation items. "But maybe this isn't the slight on Spears that it seems; maybe this whole fashion thing is just an elaborate intervention to force Aguilera to put on some clothes." For the 2005 season, Madonna was used in the ad campaign. Aguilera strutted down the catwalk at the end of the DSquared collection.

⁵ Although after "Dirrty," the next single was the ballad "Beautiful," which talks about inner beauty. Clearly, this is playing upon this good/bad girl dichotomy.

⁶ *The National Post* (January 8, 2003) placed Lavigne on the front cover with the headline "'Anti-Britney' did it her way, wins five Grammy nominations."

⁷ Not only the teen market had an opinion of Spears and Lavigne. These two became newsworthy items that were commented on not only in Arts and Entertainment sections of newspapers, but in the actual news sections. Michael Coren (*Saturday Toronto Sun*, January 11, 2003 pg. 15) wrote "*Britney vs. Avril: For so-called opposites, they have much in common.*" He poses the argument that both Spears and Lavigne are used for fans to become more partisan and spend even more money.

⁸ Featured in *SleazeNation* September 2002, pg. 26.

⁹ Back-to school fashions in 2003 were premised around these pop music stars as indicated by newspaper articles such as "Casual class: Back-to-school tweens ditch Christina garb for Avril look" (Toronto, *Canadian Press*, August 19, 2003 – *Winnipeg Sun*, 2003, pg 21).

¹⁰ *Rolling Stone* March 20, 2003, pg.41

¹¹ The record label wanted to release this as their first single from *Utopia Parkway*, but the band refused. Copies emerged and other bands began covering the song as well. See line notes from Fountains of Wayne *Out-of-States Plates*.

¹² Here are the top fifty best-selling albums, globally, in 2003. The year's best-selling album was Norah Jones' *Come Away With Me*, followed by (in order of sales): 50 Cent *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, Linkin Park *Meteora*, Dido *Life for Rent*, Beyonce Knowles *Dangerously in Love*, Coldplay *A Rush of Blood to the Head*, Evanescence *Fallen*, Britney Spears *In the Zone*, Avril Lavigne *Let Go* and Celine Dion *One Heart*. <http://www.ifpi.org/site-content/press/20040914.html>.

¹³ Before the release of *In The Zone*, articles such as "Britney hating now the latest pop sensation" were common. (Laura Seesions Stepp Tuesday, November 25, Toronto Star) and "Madonna Seals Britney's Fall," (Lynn Crosbie in January 2004, R6, *Globe and Mail*). However, the release did well, better than both Avril Lavigne releases, showing that Britney transcends negative media publicity.

¹⁴ This is not the first incident of pornographic tendencies in popular music. With the mainstreaming of Punk in the late seventies, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren owned boutiques SEX and Seditonaries which sold fetishwear (Breward, 2003:154). Elements of porno-chic are used primarily by mainstream popular artists to show their edge appeal but its roots lie in punk as a recent study linked punk music with higher sensation seeking and negatively correlated with pop/rock (Weisskrich and Murphy, 2004).

¹⁵ Common headlines in newspapers allude to porno-chic with “Britney bares all...almost” (*Toronto Sun*, Monday October 20, 2003) and on April 4, 2004 with the front-page caption: “Bad Girl!”

¹⁶ In the June 2003 edition of *Spin* where the issue was devoted to 75 Sleazy Moments in Rock, Spears placed first with the alleged incident with Limp Bizkit’s Fred Durst. Durst claimed on the Howard Stern show that he engaged in sexual relations with Spears. The second most sleazy moment was how choreography in music video was taking more cues from pornography, citing Spears’ “I’m a Slave 4 U” and Aguilera’s “Dirrrty” as prime examples. Porno-chic had now entered mainstream video as *Spin* claimed this was the “age of video sin.”

¹⁷ The series debuted in 2000 which was the peak of Spears’ youthful popularity. Each girl in the video wears the same school girl attire as Spears in the video “...Baby One More Time.” The videos are produced by New Sensations to counter Hustler video’s own series, *Barely Legal*. According to Adult Video News (avn.com), the title series consistently places in the top seventy-five of adult videos each month.

¹⁸ Numerous websites and spam e-mail state that they have access to nude pictures of Spears. With the rise of Internet pornography, the amount of nude teen websites is staggering. While performing content analysis on these various sites would in itself be its own project, Spears’ image and looks are copied. A large website, Lightspeed University, features nude cheerleaders and then features various teens with their own nude sites such as Tiffany Paris, Taylor Little and Ronnie Tuscadero. The new 2005 teen model search winner is, of course, a girl who goes by the name of Britney. Spears’ face is often morphed onto pornstars engaged in sex or showing off their genitalia on various websites.

¹⁹ In 2002, 4.5 million copies of these videos were purchased. The over eighty-three editions title their series with references to bad girls and girl power. At a time when Spears was at her peak in popularity, these videos aided in the promotion of Spears as a sex-kitten with the numerous look-a-likes in these videos. <http://biz.yahoo.com/ic/106/106568.html>

²⁰ Vice Principal Rita Wilson made national headlines when she checked what type of underwear girls were wearing to a high school dance. Rather than searching students for normal contraband such as alcohol or drugs, those who were wearing thong underwear were sent home to change. This popularization of thong underwear and the corresponding looks can be attributed to Spears.

<http://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/1427309/detail.html>.

²¹ Discussion of women’s undergarments has become a part of common conversation. Russell Smith (*Globe and Mail*, Saturday, September 21, 2002: R9. “Cleavage, fine. Bellies, well, okay. But groins?”) devotes nearly half a page on the state of ever-descending waistlines, and Ann Kingston (Saturday, September 20, 2003, Saturday *National Post* SP1 “Briefly, the line is drawn”) discusses if the VPL: Visible Panty Line is on a comeback, as “even formerly thonged tease Britney Spears has moved on to modest white-cotton skivvies.”

²² The fashion cycle seems to be beginning to turn toward modest fashions. Artists such as Hilary Duff and the Olsen twins, while still popular in the media, are developing wholesome looks that counter Spears and Aguilera. (“Keep it on – prim is in as a new

selling tool.” Misty Harris, CanWest News Service, Saturday March 13, 2004. *St. Catharines Standard* E2).

²³ In *FHM's 100 Sexiest Women in The World 2006*, the highest ranking music star was Jessica Simpson at number four and Aguilera was number thirty-seven.

²⁴ The *Toronto Sun* featured Spears on several covers. On Monday, October 20, 2003, the headline that ran was “Britney Busts Out,” on January 5, 2004, “Dumb,Dumb, Da Dumb” and on April 4, 2004, “Bad Girl.” Spears’ pregnancy also garnered a front cover from the *Toronto Star* on April 14, 2005.

²⁵ *Rolling Stone* put out a full Special Collector’s Issue devoted to Spears, where she is shown in all of her red carpet outfits, her various *Rolling Stone* covers and stills from her videos. In the magazine, there are numerous full-page photos of Spears with large quotes that infer how shopping can solve all problems and her justifying her look. Quotes include: “I can be in the dumps of dumpsters and go put on a pair of new shows, and then it’s okay,” Or “The press can talk about my clothes, my hair, anything. I don’t care seriously.” While Spears may not care, the more the press talks about her clothes, the more coveted they become.

²⁶ Tommy Hilfiger had its breakout moment in 1994 when rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg wore a Tommy rugby shirt on Saturday Night Live. That year, sales of the clothing retailer increased 90 million dollars.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/infocus/fashion/hiphop.html>

²⁷ www.tommy.com/info/press-release – May 12, 1999

²⁸ A legal battle, and not bad taste, led to the dissolution between Spears and Skechers. In December 2002, Spears filed a \$1.5 million federal suit against the shoemaker, claiming the L.A.-based company improperly put her an image of her face on advertising for its line of regular roller skates, 4 Wheelers by Skechers, instead of Spears’ signature skating line, Britney Spears 4 Wheelers, costing the performer her Christmas bonus. In March, Skechers countersued for \$10 million plus, accusing Britney of fraud and breach of contract. According to them, the pop princess dragged her heels over manufacturing, design and advertising decisions, causing production delays that cost the footwear company plenty in lost sales. The two sides reached an undisclosed settlement in May. <http://www.eonline.com/News/Items/0,1,12394,00.html>

Spears has also had problems with her restaurant Nyla, as it went into bankruptcy.

²⁹ On the Trashy Lingerie website an entire section is dedicated to press where Trashy reveals what films and television show use their products as well as celebrities are seen in their attire. http://shop.trashy.com/index.php?s=trashy_press

Chapter Six – Brand it like Britney: Music Artists as Fashion Brands

A music icon's style contributes to the reigning hegemony of popular fashion.¹ While Britney Spears conjures up much moral panic about dressing in a sexy manner and what constitutes acceptable forms of female sexuality in contemporary fashion, her largest contribution lies in the fact that she has helped spawn a mega-culture of consumption. Her popularity has led to the birth of the music artist as a full-fledged fashion designer. She is the primary reason why there has been such a strong emphasis placed on style and designer fashions in popular culture; her appearance is discussed just as much as her music. This emphasis has led to a shift in the way that music is used in dictating popular fashion. Class categories in fashion primarily occur through the differentiation of brands and designers. The combination of fashion branding and music stars has led to what I call a *signabrand*, the newest of terms yet still in the era of postmodernism.

Although Jean Kilbourne validly suggests that “we are encouraged not only to constantly buy more but to seek our identity and our fulfillment through what we buy,” she goes on to claim that advertising gives a false perception of body image that is extremely dangerous for girls and women (1999:82). Arguments such as Kilbourne's assume that everybody's reception of all media is the same and that women, or even men for that matter, are so seduced by these images that they cannot fully make any choices for themselves. Media effects theory, and especially reception analysis tells us that audience responses are both more diverse and complex. Wendy McElroy counters that

every decision is made in the presence of cultural pressures. To invalidate a woman's choice...is to deny her the one protection she has against that environment: namely, the right to decide for herself how to change things for the better (2002:153).

While marketers and media tactics do create the need for beauty and certain appearances, other factors such as geography, demographics and, in this chapter, popular music rely on vastly different forces than simply seeing something on television or in a magazine. Music is not only about the song, but about the song's corresponding look and lifestyle. Women and men both actively choose what music they listen to and can act out their musical preferences through dress. Understanding the consumptive practices that emerge out of the popularity of music icons and how this popularity switches from one icon to another, is a method to understanding how the identity of music stars, is used to sell clothing. Spears is a Trojan Horse because while mass media and academics primarily discuss her in relation to gender and sexuality, she is in fact far more stable than the Enron corporation ever was. Her consistent and constant media presence ensures a fashion style that revolves around purchasing one's identity through various goods, notably clothing.

In popular culture, interpellation refers to the ways that cultural products address their consumers and recruit or position them into a particular ideological position (Althusser, 1971). Images can be said to designate the kind of viewer they want us to be and, try to shape us into a particular ideological subject through an unconscious force seducing us via hidden determinations (Blackman, 2005:5). The image of the musical icon as depicted through music video produces such a force and hence ideologies. In Britney Spears' video "Do Somethin," a one-second cutaway clip

sums up how fashion icon Britney managed to embrace haute couture and bring it to the masses. In the video, various dance scenes take place in nightclubs with Spears and her posse. These sequences are interspersed with scenes of Spears and her group engaging in activities together such as driving in a pink Hummer vehicle. The camera then cuts to the interior of the car, showing that it is upholstered in Louis Vuitton, the maker of exquisite luggage, handbags, shoes and clothing. The logo became a marker of fine taste for a connoisseur who recognized exceptional craft and was not willing to sacrifice quality over price. The current rise of this designer logo stems from Spears' ideology of consumption-as-style.

It is now common for women of all age groups to sport Louis Vuitton,² Kate Spade³ or Prada⁴ handbags that were previously reserved for the pseudo-elite posh crowds. It is not uncommon for girls as age of 12 to own a purse with a retail cost of \$500 or more. In 2001, Louis Vuitton saw a 19 per cent growth in the US domestic market and 18 per cent growth in the fourth quarter, with 75 per cent of this demand coming from local clients, while all its competitors saw demand fall, often sharply.⁵ By 2004, US sales had increased by 30 per cent in dollar sales. It may be no coincidence that Jessica Simpson's own obsession with Louis Vuitton gave a boost to the posh brand that same year.⁶ It was Google's most popular brand name search as well as the second-most searched item on eBay in 2004.⁷ Even Avril Lavigne, the so-called anti-Britney, was photographed holding a LV bag. By August 2005, Business Week magazine ranked the brand 18th in terms of value, placing it ahead of Pepsi, Sony and Gap.⁸ The knowledge that ordinary people now have about these fashions

has risen, as other high-end designer labels such as Prada, Gucci, Dior, Chanel, Jean Paul Gauthier and Burberry have become part of the vernacular of common culture.

Althusser stressed that ideology does not represent the world, but human beings' relation to the world and to their perceptions of the real conditions of existence. In other words, ideology is the imaginary or the represented version – the stories people tell each other about their relation to the world (Althusser, 1969:231-236). These stories are now being told with such luxury items as the Vuitton bag. The bag or the logo itself represents a status symbol that *can be purchased*. The “real condition” of existence is that our culture judges on the basis of appearance. By possessing the Vuitton logo, one is demonstrating the embrace of a culture of consumption and, ultimately, capitalism.

The fashion cycle (see chapter two) is based on an hegemonic model, as owning a Vuitton bag is not laughed at or frowned upon, but embraced. It has become a staple, a standard piece in one's fashion collection. While Vuitton has been in existence for hundreds of years, it will be interesting to see whether there will ever be a fallout of this luxury item if a new music icon emerges who does not embrace fashion through luxury goods. How people use music icons to express themselves through fashion demands further exploration as fashion, not intellect, has become the ultimate class marker.

Capital, Class and Culture

Capital is a crucial determinant of consumption, whether capital is defined as the amount of dollars or the knowledge that is needed to be in style. Spears' fashion

and looks have been so commercially appropriated that many brands can charge high prices for ready-to-wear fashions. These fashions transcend the gap between the youth demographic and an older crowd and results in girls who want to grow up and women who crave youth. However, fashion is no longer the preserve of any one age group. Thomas Hine believes that we live our lives in a realm called the “buyosphere,” a series of windows through which we are eager to glimpse at all sorts of possibilities (2002:65). These possibilities all revolve around consumption and shopping, as they are the outlets that form a major basis of expression if one is part of or in opposition to contemporary culture values. Consumption is cool and one does not learn how to consume through formal schooling, but by observing and participating in popular culture. Laura Oswald notes that the new American family lives in a culture of aggressive market segmentation practices and a new materialism (2003:320). This new materialism becomes a way of expressing knowledge about current cultural trends that revolve around fashion. Just glancing at someone determines one’s instant credibility and perceived social status.

Collins’ notion of high-pop “transforming Culture into mass entertainment” is in full effect with a wide demographic trying to attain that which was previously perceived as being reserved for the upper class (2002:6). This convergence of class and culture is even found in the prices of jeans and is the reason why fashion labels are able to charge hefty sums for tank tops, midriff shirts and lingerie.⁹ As the widely-accepted definition of culture has moved away from Matthew Arnold’s (1965) notion “of the best that has been said and done” to the “ordinary” discussed by Raymond Williams (1958), three categories of taste emerged, according to Russel Lynes:

lowbrow, middlebrow and highbrow (1985:44). But, while culture is clearly still involved in a symbiotic relationship with taste, these three markers have become harder to distinguish and define, as they depend less on money and formal schooling and more on knowledge through acquisition of cultural capital.

To show how Lynes' categories have eroded, John Seabrook coined the term "nobrow" to indicate that the old cultural distinctions of highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow have ceased to exist; instead, what has transpired is "the melding of culture with the marketing of culture and the culture of marketing" (Seabrook, 2000:2). Seabrook believes that designer clothes are now indistinguishable from no-frill department stores' merchandise:

there was a time when mass merchants like The Gap knocked off the high styles of elite designers like Helmut Lang, selling inferior versions of designer clothes for much less. But now in the Helmut Lang store you find knockoffs of the T-shirts and jeans they sell in both the mid-brand and low-brand stores (Seabrook, 2000:164).

For Seabrook, this spending-and-seeking for style is now the norm, as opposed to the dressing-down style of previous music genres. It is not only acceptable to spend money on one's appearance, it is a must; whereas one might once have been laughed at or criticized for spending \$320 on a pair of jeans, now this purchase is made every season. Even if one does not have the money to wear the designer items, first order simulacras – counterfeits – and second order simulacras – copies through the means of production¹⁰ – are produced and middle-scale retailers such as Target and Old Navy help their customers maintain style on a semi-affordable budget.¹¹

While Seabrook attempts to redefine or demolish these categories, he still adheres to preconceived notions of high, middle and lowbrow, when in fact they are arbitrary categories. Ripped jeans, for example, might indicate that a person cannot afford a better pair, but might equally well represent the latest fashion style. Seabrook expands his argument by questioning how designer jeans really signify one's class status, as the jeans may be simply in poor taste and not what high fashion (according to him and class purists) is supposed to be:

as the middle class got better and better at appropriating the distinctive styles of the rich, imperfections and all, the rich were forced to go-over greater extremes of imperfection to distinguish themselves, making high fashion out of clothes so imperfect and ugly, in such poor taste (in the High-Low sense) that no self respecting middle-class person would want to knock them off, like the \$3800 ripped and beaded Gucci jeans that were all the rage last fall (2000:168).

It becomes clear that Seabrook has ignored, or perhaps dismissed, the contribution of Pierre Bourdieu. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu writes that in order to understand a legitimate work, one needs to understand its history, gather a certain competence and bring into play a certain disposition (1984:40). One must also have the capacity to constitute objects that are ordinary or even "common." Seabrook's idea of "nobrow" is too extreme since all it really shows is that whatever High-Low sense that might have existed in the past changes within Culture and popular culture. Fashion is a powerful contributor in this rapidly changing process.

Michelle Lee has coined the term "fashion victim" (2003:xi). This is someone "who follows trends slavishly, a person who is not necessarily captivated by the beauty of a new garment so much as by the mere novelty of it and the social standing

it conveys” (2003:xi). While there are varying degrees of this victimization, very few have escaped purchasing a luxury item beyond their immediate financial means.¹² This type of consumption is how our culture distinguishes us individually from one another and categorizes us according to class. The only class that does not have to play the fashion victim game is the *élite*, as its members possess resources such as higher education that the mass public lacks. James Twitchell in *Loving it Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury* shows how he trivializes fashion and class culture when he states, “even after all my research, if you dropped me into Gucci or Prada, removed all the insignia, and asked me to tell you which was which, I’d be unable to do it” (2002:118). To Twitchell, the distinction between brands does not matter because he is part of the *élite*. He could distinguish between two works of literature because, to him, this matters. In a visually oriented culture, what matters more is what one wears than what one knows. However, one must gain knowledge of what to wear, and this knowledge is primarily achieved through mass media portrayal of music icons.

It’s Me and the Band...ugh, Brand

Brand awareness in fashion has now become a common component of culture. Sharon Zukin notes “in the current age of rapid image circulation, it [the brand] tells a product’s story – a story that compels us to believe” (2004:209). Marty Neumeir goes one step further to claim that a brand is not a logo, not a corporate identity, not a product, but a gut feeling about a product, service or company (2003:2). Clothing brands convey Zukin’s story through their advertisements, increasingly using music stars as their spokespeople. While product placement has become the norm in feature

film, brands gain credibility in popular music when the artist namedrops it by her or his own choice. While this type of promotion does provide a free plug to the brand at hand in question, it also places the brand's chances of success in the hands of the artist.

Consumers rely on brands to give them certain value and comfort. A brand is made up of four components: core values, brand message, brand personality and brand icons (Moser, 2003:135). A brand achieves success through brand equity, defined as: the brand assets (or liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) a product or service. These assets can be grouped into four dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000:17). When a company uses a music star to promote a brand, they hope that the star can represent their products to a wide majority of people who then believe that brand has distinct characteristics. The brand then becomes associated with a certain type of lifestyle that is exclusive and distinct, and hopefully the consumer returns to the same brand. For instance, while 7-UP and Sprite are both clear, carbonated beverages, it is Sprite that has distinguished itself from 7-UP by associating its name with hip-hop culture.¹³

Over the course of 2003, it became apparent that the *Billboard* charts represented a marker of monitoring brand relevance in popular music and youth culture. According to the firm Agenda, Inc. (www.agendainc.com/brand.html), there were eighty-two different brands mentioned in the *Billboard* Top 20 in 2003. Of the 111 songs in the *Billboard* Top 20, forty-three had brand names in the lyrics; the most highly mentioned brand in 2003 was Mercedes Benz, and the artist who mentioned

the most brands was 50 CENT. The top five fashion brands mentioned were Gucci, Burberry, Prada, Payless Shoes and Dolce & Gabbana.

In 2004, songs were even more branded than in 2003. There were 105 songs listed and of those songs, 40 per cent mention at least one brand. Kanye West, who mentioned nineteen brands in his four singles of 2004, beat 50 Cent as the most brand-dropping rapper. The top five fashion brands mentioned were Gucci, Victoria's Secret, BCBG (tie), Jimmy Choo (tie), Marc Jacobs (tie), Bebe (tie), Roberto Cavalli and Versace. In 2004, a wider range of categories emerged. Fashion brands fell sharply from 494 to 281 and car brands fell back from 476 to 449, while beverage brands jumped from 172 to 251. This slight dip again shows that the fashion cycle is slowly moving away from luxury brands and towards a more DIY aesthetic.

In 2005, 50 Cent reclaimed his title as he was the top brand-dropping artist. The top fashion brand mentioned was Nike followed by Louis Vuitton and Dolce and Gabbana. Fourth place ended up a four-way tie with two denim brands, Seven for all Mankind and True Religion and two fashion staples, Donna Karan and Fendi. It is not surprising that niche denim labels were introduced as music stars such as Britney Spears were constantly wearing the latest in denim for a few years now. While the number of fashion brands declined again to 211, there was a rise of artists who were now turning into fashion designers (see next section).

Still, with the prevalence of fashion brands, one must redefine the traditional definition of consumer. Although de la Pena discusses how fashion boutiques such as the Prada flagship store in the Soho district of New York City enable consumers to *“imagine themselves as purchasers of those goods, regardless of whether an actual*

purchase takes place” (2003:111), this idea equally applies to the fashion themselves. Brands help enable consumers to think about purchasing material goods which creates an environment in which the second type of “purchase” – the imagining of a purchase – is much easier to accomplish than the first. The brand becomes an act of performance, which engages consumers’ bodies and encourages shoppers to closely connect with (or disapprove of) the brand at hand. Although one may not immediately purchase something from Prada, the fact that one can aspire to purchase that certain brand at all enables a mindset and a brand association with similar labels. Similarly, through the consumption of a song or film, one has in some sense “consumed” the image of the product, often the product being the artist themselves. Traditionally, the product would be the actual album but now it is the perceived lifestyle of the artist and the corresponding elements which fashion plays a heavy part in. While one does not even have to purchase brand clothes, these artifacts become performance pieces where consumers can imagine themselves in the roles that these brands assume, creating a rapid fashion cycle.

Celia Lury suggests that information, operationality and technique (which would constitute elements of cultural capital) all revolve around brand knowledge:

First, the brand coordinates the interobjective communication of things through the application of information, that is knowledge that is objectively arrived at through techniques of data manipulation. Second, it does not apply to a subject of representation, a deep self-whose interior life is developed in terms of learning, taste and judgement, but to an individual who operates techniques of selection, connection and transformation (2002:222).

Selection, connection and transformation have caused a massive shift in the signature-brand relationship. Selection refers to how one chooses a particular brand over the other. Selection is not determined by meticulous research of the actual ingredients or components that suit an individual's immediate needs, but rather how a brand connects to an individual's lifestyle. Connection can appear through the advertising of the brand (or how exclusive the brand is so that traditional advertising is unwarranted) but increasingly so, connection happens via indirect methods such as through popular music and the icons that emerge from it. If a connection is made with a brand, one engages in a transformation where the values of the brand become intertwined with the individual's needs. The brand relies on the individual as much as the trust that the individual places in the brand that it will deliver the level of uniqueness that one wants. As an individual's needs and music preferences change, as one desires to strive to be unique or seek conformity, this process starts over again and, just as with a relationship between two people, the relationship between brand and individual is broken and both seek fulfillment elsewhere.

Signasponsors, Signastars and Signabrands: Signatures as Brands

Frow distinguishes a signature from a brand in that "the brand is a corporate rather than a personal signature" (2002:63). He goes on to argue that the brand differs from the signature "in its more intensive management of the integrity of the brand, and its use of the intensive semiotic work of advertising and publicity to regulate market demand" (2002:71). Increasingly, however, the signature is becoming the brand with no clear distinction between the two, which results in what I call a

signabrand. There are three distinct processes between signature and brand in the relationship between music and fashion. The signabrand is a relatively new development and only became popular when it was realized that the lifestyle that brands promoted and that individuals sought to be part of could be replaced with a physical icon, rather than an inanimate symbol. The first step in the evolution to signabrands is the *signasponsor*. This step is where a music star releases a record and this album becomes the signature – the artist’s mark of authenticity or calling out to the world. If the artist becomes successful, various brands try to become part of the artist’s signature. The brand now connotes the song and the message and values that the song represents. Of course, there is not one direct message, but an overall feeling that the brand wants to express, usually through direct sponsorship. For example, Britney Spears released the song “...Baby One More Time.” It became her signature and Tommy Hilfiger then signed on to become her clothing sponsor.¹⁴ Tommy Hilfiger became the brand that carried out the wishes of the signature. Britney-as-song becomes represented through the clothing; she is now Britney-as-Tommy Hilfiger-clothing. This association is still a semiotic denotation/connotation process where Tommy Hilfiger becomes associated with Britney Spears. This relationship enables a micro-managed system where

brands are typically managed to ensure that products are consistent with brand image and that competitors do not encroach on it, and typically supported by controlled advertising campaigns which seek to construct and maintain the coherence and integrity of that image (Frow, 2002:63).

The foundation of the company, the overall key message, tone, attitude and any unique elements all rest upon the music star and the ad campaign behind them. At

times, the campaign may not be direct such as in print ads, but indirectly by outfitting the performers for their concerts. For example, Tommy Hilfiger established his street credibility and a \$3.2 billion industry when he clothed popular hip-hop acts back in 1996, including the Fugees, Method Man and Treach. Dolce and Gabbana outfitted 'N Sync and Dido in 2001 and Kylie Minogue in 2002 (Lee, 2003:96).

Louis Vuitton used Jennifer Lopez in their 2003 campaign. Lopez was by then a successful music and film star, having both a number one record and number one movie in the same week.¹⁵ When she modeled for LV, they became associated with a hipper, urban feel showing that if a Latin woman from the Bronx could accessorize with LV, so could the average individual. The ads always featured Lopez in confident poses, such as being on top of or controlling a male. LV still catered to its key clientele but made its brand presence far more widely known, leading to even greater sales and more coverage when Lopez was dropped.¹⁶ Both parties got what they wanted – Lopez came to be recognized as a diva and LV became a popular handbag among the larger middle class population at large, with sales rising to \$300 million.¹⁷

The next stage of branding, *signastar* results when music artists wear a particular brand so much that they become a signature for the brand, although they are not officially sponsored by the brand itself. Ja Rule frequently wears Burberry in his videos, Nelly wore a Gucci hat in “Nellyville” and Jay-Z’s “Girls Girls Girls” video featured two Christian Dior shirts (Lee, 2003:112). It is not surprising that the Burberry Group, the British luxury goods seller that revitalized an eighty-year-old plaid design has had its profits increase in the past three years¹⁸.

The brand VON DUTCH is a prime example of the synergy between artist and brand. Originally created for hot-rod enthusiasts, it was one of the most popular brands in youth culture. The trucker hat, a baseball cap with mesh on the back and a wide high rise, was what Von Dutch attempted to make their key look for signature wearers. By 2003, the company's sales reached \$33 million, and were projected to exceed \$100 million in 2004 (Patton, 2004). On the Von Dutch website, there is a monthly photo album showing celebrities in Von Dutch wear. From November 2002-August 2004, out of 383 images showcased, 190 were music stars. (Britney Spears is seen on the website thirteen times). What made the Von Dutch brand so popular is that it could represent so many signatures and music stars from all genres. How could a rap-metal band Limp Bizkit wear the same thing as pop starlet Shakira? Brands once had specific niche markets. What the hip-hop community wore is not what bubble-gum teens wore, but signasponsors have managed to target multiple niches. One brand can have more than one signature and although there does not have be a direct sponsorship link anymore, there still seems to be one as, "brands have a 'personality' because they make use of strategies of personalization (the use of characters, celebrities, direct address) to create something like a signature-effect" (Frow, 2002:71). This signature effect results in a single brand reflecting different values and lifestyles to a wide range of clientele. Von Dutch created multiple lifestyles and niches through a single brand by associating itself with a whole slew of music stars who are responsible for guiding the fashion cycle.

I am not a Designer, I Just Play one on TV: Signabrands as Lifestyle Markers

The last process, which is becoming the norm, and which is the crux of this thesis, is the emergence of the **signabrand**. This is where the signature and brand merge into one – the brand can act as the signature when it is represented by the same entity. A prominent example is JLO by Jennifer Lopez. Lopez is the artist/signature, but rather than seek another brand to represent the signature (as she did with the Louis Vuitton bags), the signature becomes the brand. This type of branding is different from Calvin Klein for example. While Calvin Klein is a designer's name, the signature and the corresponding brand, the difference with signabrands *is that the signature is initially known for something other than what the signature is branding*. Signabrands must contain an icon because these are the people who become recognized outside of their known environments.

Icons come to represent what Douglas Holt calls **identity myths** wherein consumers use icons to address identity desires and anxieties (2004:2).¹⁹ Signabrands provide desirable fashions and reduce anxiety in the attempt to become fashionable. Kellner cites Mariah Carey, Jennifer Lopez, Britney Spears and Destiny's Child as deploying "the tools of the glamour industry and media spectacle to make themselves spectacular icons of fashion, beauty, style, sexuality, as well as purveyors of music" (2003:9). Although it is uncertain whether Kellner picked the above artists for their brand associations, the combination of fashion, beauty, style and sexuality mixed in with a dash of music is the recipe for a signabrand. With signabrands, the image supercedes the music as the offshoots are what matters more.

One can therefore listen to Jennifer Lopez, watch her films and then wear the fashions that she represents. The track suit was a popular JLO look and became not only a part of gym attire, but also a marker of being hip. Her company bio boasts this trendiness proudly, stating “By Summer 2002, JLO had firmly taken a position as the leader of the velour sweat suit trend, which continues to lead in the junior and urban market.”²⁰ By 2003, JLO the brand, not Jennifer Lopez the artist, posted product sales of \$250 million.²¹ Lopez’s fragrance GLOW, was followed by another STILL. The two fragrances have totaled \$200 million in sales, exceeding expectations, according to Bernard Beetz, the CEO of Coty.²² Although the tracksuit was first made trendy by upscale label Juicy Couture, which Nelly Furtado and Lopez herself wore in music videos, it became high-pop after Lopez reappropriated the trend.²³ So while Juicy held on to the fashion victims, JLO sought a wider market so that she could wear and sell her own suit. These types of associations are one reason that 21 per cent of females credit celebrities as a source for clothing ideas in the third quarter of 2002, a jump from 18 per cent in the previous quarter, according to the Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor.²⁴

Other artists are also part of this signabrand relationship, including Eve (Fetish), Gwen Stefani (L.A.M.B.), P. Diddy (Sean John), Kylie Minogue (Love Kylie), Jessica Simpson (Dessert), Wu-Tang Clan (Wu-Wear), Eminem (Shady), 50 Cent (G-Unit), Blink-182 (Atticus), Bono of U2 (Edun) and Jay-Z (Rocawear). All have clothing lines that are successful and considered as fashion as opposed to the souvenir shirt variety. P. Diddy’s Sean John label recently won the Council of Fashion Designers of America men’s designer of the year award and earned \$300

million at retail last year.²⁵ Launched in 1999, Jay-Z's Rocawear generated more than \$80 million in revenue in its first eighteen months of business and reported revenue of \$250 million for 2002 (Hall, 2003:15).

Every demographic has a signabrand it can relate to. While Britney Spears no longer caters to her once core tween market, Hilary Duff has emerged as the next marketing phenomenon, launching her clothing line exclusively at Zellers, aptly titled Stuff. No genre of music or class can escape the signabranding process. The same tactics are used for designer fashions as well as for signabrand. Duff becomes exclusive to Zellers in the same manner that Stefani's L.A.M.B. is exclusive to Canada's luxury goods department store Holt Renfrew.

Rather than a company profiting from artists' successes, now the artists profit directly. This distinction is important as, in the age of downloading and music pirating, this association ensures that the artist can still be a viable commodity. The fashion collections also keep the artist in the limelight in between record releases. The artist, rather than the brand, gets instant awareness from the logos and looks, making the fashion designer less prevalent. With the rise of the music star, according to the Licensing Industry Merchandisers' Association, manufacturers cut spending on entertainment characters by \$78 million in 2004.²⁶ There is no point marketing Barbie on a T-shirt when Hilary Duff is readily available and willing to market herself.

What makes signabrand unique is that the icon represented in the signabrand can be part of other brand processes. Beyonce Knowles can star in Tommy Hilfiger's new ad campaign and simultaneously produce her own fashion label, House of Dereon. The first celebrity-as-brand star label can be attributed to tennis star Jean

Rene Lacoste in 1933 and although rap mogul Russel Simmons started Phat Farm in 1992, it was only in 1998 that P. Diddy became an actual music star-turned-designer.²⁷ The signabrand is a new phenomenon: while it is common knowledge that Air Jordans are shoes made by Nike, signabrand brands disguise the manufacturer of the product and create the image that the icon or star in question is the actual designer.

The concept of signabranding has emerged as Generation Y entered and ended the angst-ridden Generation X era. Gen-Y was identified in the early 1990s as the then current crop of teenagers born between 1974 and 1980.²⁸ These teenagers lived at a time when artists were quite worried about selling out and tried to stay true to their music and their own particular subculture. However by the end of the nineties, musicians become sponsors in the same way athletes did and were accepted as such with little backlash, as events such as Woodstock drew large crowds and attracted a diverse line-up of performers. Sponsorship from Pepsi or from a skate-shoe company Vans was not frowned upon but embraced, partially because mainstream music changed from grunge to pop and the effect was that style and fashion now mattered unlike in the Generation X and alternative years, where rebellion and looking like you did not care about appearances was popular. Barnard, Cosgrave and Welsh title those born between the early sixties and late seventies as the Nexus Generation, where as consumers they search for Invisible Cool (1998:147): although they are trend-conscious as any other generation of young people, they do not want to be seen as trendy or conformist – they avoid in-your-face brand association. However, the new crop of teenagers, those born after 1981 – the Millennials – are the opposite of the teenagers immediately preceding them (Strauss and Howe, 2000). They embrace

brands and consumption even more so than Generation Y because they have already been targeted and socialized through music icons to become fashion conscious consumers on the path to adolescence. Whatever the change in fashion preference may be, the use of music remains persistent. When a style of music or a particular icon becomes popular, the way that music is used to aid in consumptive fashion practices changes as well.

The fact that music artists are referred to as brands indicates that such hybridities are now an accepted part of enjoying popular music.²⁹ Music stars project an identity that people either accept or reject – you like a certain act or not. Nevertheless, as music stars become a large part of the general popular culture, one can enjoy certain aspects of the stars as opposed to their entire personas. One acquires a steadfast criterion of likes and dislikes in music. One may not like Britney Spears' music, but the public's choice in attire indirectly represents the artist. One could be completely opposed to all commercial avenues of popular culture only to find low-rise jeans available at the new arrival sections of the mall, or discover to like the scent of Spears' perfume, Curious. While signabrands provide an easier avenue for associating one's identity with a music star, they also provide the opposite situation where the branded product enables a sense of legitimacy to the music.

Music and fashion do not have to be necessarily linked since fashion can exert an independent inference on identity, even if one does not like popular music. However, with signabrands, the brand, which in fact is the artist/signature, has the opportunity to showcase its wares far more than traditional designers do. Signabrands are made aware to the public through the artists' music videos and, consequently,

media coverage on news programs and in magazines. Signabrands become a familiar face, unlike supermodels, who do not assume a signature relationship to any brand. And even if supermodels such as Kate Moss or Naomi Campbell become famous, it is highly unlikely that one could pick out designers Miuccia Prada, Heide Slimane or Alexander McQueen unless one saw them on the runway at the end of their collections. Supermodels work for various designers and cannot establish a signabrand relationship because they are dependent on the fashion seasons in Milan, Paris, London and New York to make them part of popular culture.

The signabrand artist is now no longer associated with their music, but with associations around their music. If the artist is a “designer,” this correlation somehow gives them credibility as a musician and designer. Signabrands are proactive with these associations, as there consequently becomes a perceived quality of the artists. The records they make have to be good since there is so much extra curricular material around the release. If JAY-Z is the best rapper, then his Reebok shoes must be pretty good. If Kylie Minogue is attractive and sexy, then surely her lingerie must be very seductive. If Gwen Stefani is funky and daring, then her designs must also be as such. The associations produce a pyramid effect in that there are multiple connections to the signabrand, such as a combination of traditional brand components, for example: user imagery, product attributes, use situations, organizational associations, brand personality and symbols (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000:17). User imagery revolves around how the user imagines employing a brand. With a signabrand, the user does not imagine simply utilizing the brand, but having the lifestyle associated with the brand. While a brand such as

Timberland tries to promote itself as a rugged, outdoorsy label, a signabrand such as G-Unit, because it is representing an actual group of rappers, portrays them as leading a thug-and-party lifestyle. Product attributes are the characteristics that distinguish one brand from the other. Timberland appeals to more of an urban clientele whereas those who work in actual rugged terrain prefers brands such as Arcteryx, North Face or Patagonia. Use situations are how the products of a brand are perceived to be used. Timberland products are thought of as being practical in a variety of extreme weather conditions, even though their items can be purchased at a mall and are rarely sold at specialty camping stores. With a signabrand, the quality of the products is solely perceived through the artist. How the product is used is reflective of how the artist performs in music videos and is represented in mass media. Organizational associations are the corresponding brands that fit within the same brand lifestyle. Timberland associates itself aside from camping and the outdoors, with urban living and hip-hop. Signabrands associate themselves with their corresponding music. For example, L.A.M.B. is not only Gwen Stefani's clothing line, it is the name of her solo record as well.³⁰ Brand personality is how the brand makes all of its characteristics known and what it becomes known for, its distinguishable features. Timberland creates an image through advertising and public relations but the brand also gets publicity when hip-hop stars appear wearing their boots. A signabrand's image is created externally through other means, as the artist is already known and has a public perception of leading a certain lifestyle. For example, Kylie Minogue has always been thought of as a sex symbol and, thus, selling her own lingerie line was a natural fit. Symbols become the logo that represent the brand. With Timberland, the logo of a

tree represents the brand. With signabrands, the symbol is the actual name of the label itself. Sean John and L.A.M.B. do not have logos because the name is a symbol already. Thus for a signabrand, the imagery is created in the videos, product attributes are in the fashion lines, use situations are reflected in music video and publicity in the perception that the clothing is needed to be in style, organizational associations are the avenues where the clothing can be purchased, brand personality is developed in the advertising and symbols such as JLO are created that become accepted as the artist's name. The following chart shows the main differences between brands and signabrands:

Brands	Signabrands
Image created through marketing	Image created through icon's past work
Features in product	Features in icon's lifestyle
Create environment to use product	Environment established
Promote brand through linkages	Promote brand through icon
Lifestyle trying to be created	Lifestyle predetermined

Signabrands also rely on brand loyalty, but to a different extent. Kevin A. Clark (2004) coined the term "brandsendence" as these are brands that exceed, surpass and are superior over time. This progression occurs through 1) relevance – where idea and character drive the brand experience, 2) context – how the brand develops adaptive behaviour and 3) mutual behaviour – how the brand develops interdependent relationships. However, signabrands do not need brandsendence as the signature drives the brand experience providing the necessary context and mutual behaviour. The loyalty is not meant to be established for an extended period, but only

for a short-lived fashion season. Signabrands create the appearance that they are niche brands, that they are small, exclusive and only available for people in-the-know. This perception creates an intensely loyal customer base that can distinguish between all of the products. Signabrands take on attributes of designer labels such as Dolce and Gabbana, Gucci and Prada by making their product exclusive, showcasing it in special locations and select stores and charging prices similar to designer wear. By following this formula, they have become very profitable. Unlike traditional designers, signabrands are not as exclusive because their label gets far more promotion through publicity from their artists and the perceived exclusivity is scaled down. Sean John can be found in Foot Locker and at Macy's in the United States. As much as everybody seeks to be unique, there is only a certain extent that one wants to be different from everyone else. Signabrands provide a different fashion forum than traditional fashion designers and brands, yet provide similar enough styles that still make them popular. Signabrands also make themselves authentic as that authenticity is ascribed to, rather than inscribed in, a performance. Music stars can be deemed authentic by a particular group of perceivers and that "it is the success with which a particular performance conveys its impression that counts, a success which depends in some part on the explicitly musical decisions performers make" (Moore, 2002:209). And that decision is to be directly part of the fashion process, rather than relying on a signasponsor.

We Bought *No Logo*, but Really Wanted the Brand: Why?

Naomi Klein's book *No Logo* (2000) traces the development of branding in our culture and how it has altered our consumption experiences. She discusses the role of music and fashion, claiming that bands with their own merchandising lines have dominated popular culture and that musicians have never before competed so aggressively with consumer brands (2000:50). Kalle Lasn, founder of *Adbusters* magazine, suggests that culture jamming, that is trying to change one's fixations with icons and brands by "decooling" them through planting anti-fashion/brand messages and exposing any travesties that corporations behind the brands have committed such as sweatshop labour, is the only way to conquer mass corporate involvement with culture. Lasn, claims that brands and marketers have taken this desire to be cool and reversed its meaning:

Now you're cool if you are not unique – if you have the look and feel that bear the unmistakable trademark of America™...Cool is the opiate of our time, and over a couple of generations, we have grown dependent on it to maintain our identities of inclusion (1999:113).

Alissa Quart's *Branded* (2003) exposes how teenagers are marketed to so seductively. From magazines to malls to music, research companies such as Teenage Research Unlimited exist that provide style files and teen trends to companies willing to pay a hefty price. Klien, Lasn and Quart have an extremely negative view of teen branding and marketing. Their publications assume that branding dictates music, but in fact the exact opposite occurs. How branding evolves and possibly dies lies in the next music trend coupled with the postmodern condition. As much as these books pose Adorno-esque tendencies of consumers as "temple slaves" (1991:39), they tend to all

explain how this mass consumerism happened rather than why. Because popular music follows the fashion cycle (see chapter two), any excessive fashion trends and behaviours will eventually tip to something else. We are merely in a long blip of the cycle, as it is easy to witness how this type of branding has evolved. The music and the stars behind the music are responsible for this brand nation.

It would seem that as much as one might try to jam and subvert culture, the more creative the process of marketing fashion products becomes. For example, Andy Hilfiger worked with his brother Tommy and as vice-president of the company for publicity was responsible in their dressing Aaliyah, Britney Spears, the Fugees, Kid Rock, Sheryl Crow, The Who, the Rolling Stones, the Ramones, Cheap Trick, Metallica, TLC and Destiny's Child. After the brand started to fade, Andy launched Music Entertainment Fashion and announced the formation of Sweetface Fashion, the company behind JLO (Burlingham, 2003:64). Another example is Mark Ecko, designer of the popular Ecko brand. He founded his own popular culture magazine, *Complex*. In the August/September 2004 issue of the top twenty-five style makers, the magazine (his own!) placed him as number nine.

These synergies between music artist and fashion designer are now common. Music stars give fashion a credibility that no other type of star can. While this artist-as-brand-as-designer will change as the evolution progresses through the fashion cycle, there has to be a reason as to why a track suit is not just a track suit or a jean jacket is not just a jean jacket with a JLO insignia. This shift in our culture merely reaffirms the presence of postmodernism in consumption and production.

Postmodernism...Now added with Vanilla!

Signabrands help package identities as sets of ideas by providing an experience not with somebody we know, but with somebody we think we want to know. While one could argue that a signabrand designer is no different than wearing a true fashion label such as Moschino, Dior or Armani, the difference lies in that such labels try to open avenues of identity for consumers to express themselves, whereas signabrands appear to create a definite path. For the wearer, the opportunity for interpretation of the meaning of designer clothes is more open than for signabrand clothing. Colin Campbell poses three certain assumptions have been made about appearance: 1) that because people find an individual's appearance 'meaningful' it is presumed to have meaning, 2) it is assumed that this 'singular' meaning is intended and 3) that individuals must be 'making a statement' to those in a position to observe them (1997: 348). With signabrands, these assumptions can be validated. While some could enjoy signabrand fashions based on the styles alone, this audience is a small fraction as wearing a signabrand shows a singular meaningful statement to others as a star is reflected in the clothing.

Signabrands provide just enough differentiation for consumers that they can distinguish similar clothing solely by which star is wearing it. Steven Brown notes that postmodernism is characterized by seven key features: fragmentation, de-differentiation, hyper-reality, chronology, pastiche, anti-foundationalism and pluralism (1995:106). Signabrands are represented by all these features as they segment fashion markets yet still cater to a mass public and create a breakdown in high and low class distinctions. These fashions become accessible to a wide market,

yet most are priced at high fashion market values. This type of marketing leads to a state of hyper-reality (see chapter three) as there is a loss of authenticity for the fashion designer, causing a constant self-referencing chronology where the fashions themselves become tongue-in-cheek collages where anything goes, everything is acceptable and nothing is excluded. This attitude is made acceptable and popular, as there is no desire to seek anything as absolute and universal because a style may develop through the signabrand, or a new signabrand may appear at any moment and be “in.” For example, the JLO by Jennifer Lopez track suit became a fashion style for various niche markets such as tweens, fans of hip-hop music, young women and athletic females. Although it was a fleece track suit, the price of the item ranged between ranking it as a status marker and a high/low source where one could buy their class distinction. Now Lopez is hyper-real as she is the designer and star. The brand is dependent on these two identities. The notion of a track suit being a high-marker fashion piece is pastiche in action as this look inspired the popularity of other retro looks, such as sneakers by Kangaroos, Pony and Puma, and hip-hugger shorts for the 2004 and 2005 season. As long as there is some notion of retro in the clothing, one can relate this trend back to the track suit making the signabrand style highly influential. Grannell and Jayawardena make the claim that

Celebrities are brands. They are defined by what people think about them, they have a competitive positioning relative to other celebrities. Unlike the people behind them, celebrities exist in the minds of their audience in precisely the same way that corporate or FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) brands do (http://www.brandchannel.com/brand_speak.asp?bs_id=76).

This culture of consumption revolves around the fashion cycle, causing a cultural hegemony that is characterized best by the way that use-values and exchange-values are exploited by the postmodern culture of consumption, which privileges the image over substance (Gottdiener, 1989:36). These symbolic exchanges make signabrands an accepted and unquestioned part of fashion. Signabrands are dependent on mass media images because when stars gain publicity and approach becoming icons, their image becomes reproduced in their clothing. This virtual reproduction does not add substance to fashion, but rather is a repeated image that is played back to the public. It is a perpetual game of Pong where the artist produces a video that influences a fashion trend's emergence and that fashion trend is bounced back to the artist to be produced in the mall. And so the cycle goes.

While postmodernism cannot predict the emergence of signabrands, it provides the necessary environment for these types of fashion movements. To understand how fashion and music will evolve, it is time for a less critical culture industry stance of why the masses could possibly choose signabrands and instead try to determine how this branding evolution transpired. It is time for music and fashion to be understood from a mainstream perspective and not through alternative means like subculture theory. Following postmodernist assumptions that there has been a growth in generalized culture and a blurring between elite and popular culture, it is then argued that social structures have become unstable where choice is everything. Such choice usually comprised of plurality, difference and otherness have been incorporated into the cultural logic of marketing contemporary subcultures, strengthening the capitalist mode of production (Blackman, 2005:11-15). Using the word subculture to

understand any youth movement or style is then simply good marketing. An example is British fashion label Fred Perry's current website www.fredperry.com/subculture where the label boasts about how many subcultures have worn their clothing and a music player offers a chance to listen to new music.³¹ What is a perceived subculture or what is mainstream will always shift and understanding the process through the fashion cycle rather than the actual lifestyle movement is a start for a new form of analysis. Fashion and music are two forms that are cyclical in nature as certain genres and fashions come in and out of style. How this process occurs is at the root of popular culture studies as these shifts produce meaning with respect to identity and our ability to express ourselves in a complex world. With more attention paid to how the fashion cycle contributes to the music process, terms such as signabrand shall emerge and will help us to understand how what is played on the airwaves, becomes available on the rack and, ultimately, becomes a message on the body.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX

¹ Websites such as <http://www.asos.com/> (As Seen On Stars) provide clothing styles for purchase that are similar in style to what celebrities, primarily music stars, are wearing.

² The craze for these handbags has led to mass counterfeit production. Counterfeit bags are commonly sold in high traffic locations such as Times Square in New York or near real Vuitton stores. There are also so many on-line sites claiming to have authentic bags that the National Association of Resale and Thrift Stores devotes a link to detecting fake handbags. <http://www.hisremnant.org/Vuitton/fakes1.html>

³ Revenue for 2004 was over \$125 million, with Neiman Marcus owning the majority of the company. See Neiman Marcus web site.

⁴ The Prada company saw a 33 per cent growth in profits in 2004. <http://www.fashiongates.com/magazine/helmut-lang-11-05-05-65031.html>

⁵ <http://www.fashionunited.co.uk/news/lvmh.htm>,
http://businessweek.com/magazine/content/04_12/b3875002.htm

⁶ http://businessweek.com/magazine/content/04_12/b3875002.htm

⁷ <http://www.redherring.com/Article.aspx?a=11105&hed=Desperately%20seeking%20Spears>

⁸http://bwnt.businessweek.com/brand/2005/?chan=innovation_branding_innovation+metrics

⁹ Popular jean brands such as Seven for all Mankind and Paper Denim Cloth retail starting at the \$150 range.

¹⁰ Baudrillard argues that there are three orders of appearance: 1) the counterfeit, 2) production and 3) simulation. The first order of simulacra is the counterfeit and does not hide its artificiality. The second order of simulacra is production. The second order is associated with the distinction between the image, and the representation begins to break down because of the proliferation of copies. Production misrepresents and masks an underlying reality by imitating it too well, threatening to replace it (e.g. in photography). The third order of simulacra is the simulation, which is associated with the postmodern age. Here lies the precession of simulacra, where the representation precedes and determines what is real. The image no longer refers to anything, but becomes what is referred to. There is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum. The third order of simulacra will be discussed in relation to signabrands.

¹¹ According to a new Brand-Link Study conducted by The NPD Group, Old Navy is the apparel chain store most often shopped in by consumers who also buy music from today's most popular music artists. For example, NPD's Brand-Link Study found that 33 per cent of Good Charlotte fans shopped Old Navy, while the same could be said for only 19 per cent of Alan Jackson fans. Beyonce fans, however, showed the highest affinity for Old Navy: over 45 per cent of consumers who purchased a Beyonce CD also shopped at Old Navy. http://www.npd.com/dynamic/releases/press_030925.htm

¹² While this thesis is primarily about clothing goods, fashion victims can be found wherever luxury items exist from automobiles to food. In a 2005 poll by The New York Times, 81 percent of Americans said they had felt social pressure to buy high-priced goods. (Steinhauer, 2005:137).

¹³ http://www.usatoday.com/money/advertising/adtrack/2004-04-25-sprite_x.htm

Brand-dropping is prevalent in hip-hop, as clothing is an integral part of the culture. Fila, a popular brand among West Coast rappers, decided to back hip-hop start ups MECCA USA and ENYCE to give the rap world a more cohesive look (Lopiano-Misdorn & De Luca, 1997:179). Several brands emerged as leaders, including FUBU (For Us By Us), Karl Kani, Ecko, Phat Farm and WuWear. Although around since 1992, FUBU established a healthy relationship with many notable hip-hop artists such as Will Smith, LL Cool J and Brandy. The brand became so synonymous with the rappers that LL Cool J even wore a FUBU head wrap while appearing in a Gap commercial. By 1998, FUBU had achieved sales of \$350 million.

¹³ By 1998, rap music was the fastest-growing music genre, raking in sales of \$1.4 billion, and this genre of music for the first time witnessed the emergence of rappers as fashion designers. Russel Simmons founded the popular Def Jam Records which produced notable artists such as the Beastie Boys and Public Enemy. Simmons formed Rush Communication, which comprised of Russel Simmons Television, Def Pictures, Rush Media and Phat Fashions. The line of clothing called Phat Farm achieved sales of \$100 million in 1999 and has its own boutiques across North America.

¹⁴ See May 12, 1999, press release on Hilfiger's website.

¹⁵ *J Lo* and *The Wedding Planner* respectively.

¹⁶ Lopez came under fire for taking home every item of designer goodies in the studio after shooting the Vuitton campaign in Paris earlier this year. <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/11/27/1069825904640.html?from=storyrhs&oneclick=true>

¹⁷ http://yahoo.businessweek.com/magazine/content/04_12/b3875002.htm

¹⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/olpda/ukfs_news/hi/newsid_3741000/3741467.stm

¹⁹ See Ewen and Ewen. (1992). *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*. University of Minnesota Press for analysis on the modern consumer ethic and what anxieties are caused by it.

²⁰ <http://www.shopjlo.com/bio.php>

²¹ Toronto Star, Saturday March 13, 2004, A3

²² <http://www.sunherald.com/mld/sunherald/business/9061675.htm>

²³ Juicy Couture track suits cost \$200-\$400 whereas JLO's are in the \$100 range.

²⁴ <http://www.cottoninc.com/www/homepage.cfm?PAGE=3505>

²⁵ <http://www.fortune.com/fortune/smallbusiness/articles/0,15114,434520,00.html>

²⁶ http://www.usatoday.com/money/advertising/2004-06-07-merchandise-licensing_x.htm

²⁷ In the May 2005 issue of *Elle Canada*, a timeline is provided of various stars who have crossed over to fashion lines. See page 90.

²⁸ http://www.brandchannel.com/features_effect.asp?pf_id=156

²⁹ See Blackwell Roger, Tina Stephan (2003). *Brands That Rock: What Business Leaders Can Learn from the World of Rock and Roll* (Wiley) for the evolution of music branding.

³⁰ The way a star transcends to icon status is by becoming a signabrand. Not all signabrands are icons as while there are no quantifiable steps, there is a series of natural progressions that one must go through. While Jessica Simpson, even with a *Dukes of Hazzard* movie (in which Britney Spears was originally thought of to portray Daisy Duke), a reality show, a cosmetic line and a new denim line is not an icon – yet. She is demonstrating staying power. On the other hand, Gwen Stefani is on her way to iconic status as she has managed to have a strong solo career aside from her band No Doubt plus her fashion line is a smash. The fact that Stefani's first solo release *Love.Angel.Music.Baby* is also the name of her clothing line shows that she is paving the way for iconic status. She can control her image as her videos can reflect her fashions. She has taken on a Japanese theme centering around Harajuku girls, who are fashion queens. She name drops high end fashion designers such as Comme Des Garçons and Vivienne Westwood throughout the record and thus establishes her credibility as a fashion designer and brand. Aside from LAMB runners and baby wear, Hewlett-Packard has created a Gwen Stefani digital camera. While it seems the Stefani was in the forefront of establishing outside ventures around her music, only through the success of Britney Spears and her use of style to build a core audience were Stefani's endeavors even possible to attempt.

³¹ The Fred Perry website claims that the brand was an integral part of the following youth movements: mods, rude boys, skinheads, beatniks, punk/new wave, northern soul, two tone, britpop, indie, house/hip hop and most recently the ska/punk revival. How one brand can claim to be part of almost every supposed subculture demonstrates how co-opted and commercialized this term has become.

Conclusion
Chapter Seven – Subcultures Out, Signabrands In

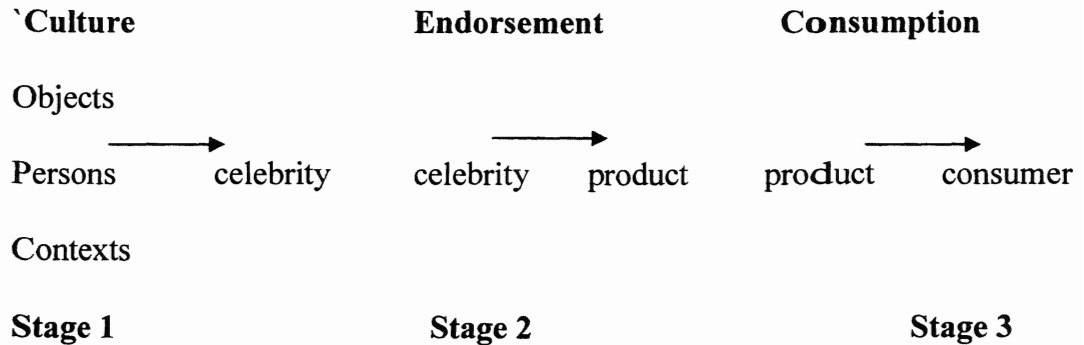
By 2007, Britney Spears was no longer on the charts, but a rather a mother to her two sons. She had divorced Kevin Federline (who released a rap album *Playing With Fire*), and caused an internet uproar when she appeared without any underwear while exiting a limousine during a night of partying with fellow brand, Paris Hilton. Although Britney no longer dominates the music charts, she remains an icon because she was instrumental in changing the relationship between music and fashion. Music and fashion have always been in symbiosis, as past icons such as Elvis, The Sex Pistols, Madonna and Nirvana used their sense of style to their advantage. But, while many designers copied the grunge look, Kurt Cobain never designed his own cardigan sweater. Now, the role of how music celebrities endorse fashion has changed as they have taken on the role of fashion designers as well. While traditional fashion designers still aid music artists in the quest for new styles,¹ the artists at hand are now putting their own names on their distinctive signature looks and loves.

In the December 2005 edition of *Elle* magazine, a pregnant Britney Spears appeared on the cover and the first question in the accompanying interview was: “You’ve created a new fragrance called Fantasy?” (Millea, 388).² The product here is not as important as how this question was posed: *you’ve created* a new fragrance. There is a direct implication that Britney Spears is the sole creator of this scent – that in her spare time she was fusing vanilla with musk. Spears never mentioned the role played by cosmetics company Elizabeth Arden in developing the new fragrance. Spears is regarded as the designer here and such celebrity associations are what I have

called “signabrands” (see chapter six). This is where the artist trying to attain icon status merges key characteristics (signatures) with a product and becomes responsible for its creation through branding. The process of becoming an icon in music today involves becoming a designer in order to have one’s visions and values displayed in other areas of popular culture.

Grant McCracken states that celebrities are useful to the endorsement process if there is a successful transfer of meaning (2005:103). A successful transfer includes having the attributes that a celebrity is known for represented in a product. McCracken has developed a figure to describe meaning movement and the endorsement process.³ McCracken’s model is:

Meaning Movement and the Endorsement Process, by Grant McCracken



Celebrities assume roles and, with these roles, certain persons, objects and contexts become associated with them. These characteristics are then represented in a particular product through marketing and advertising. The success of the product stems from how successfully the advertising and marketing translates the celebrity’s persons, objects and contexts. Even if the meaning is successfully transferred, it does not mean that the product will resonate with the public. Thus all celebrity

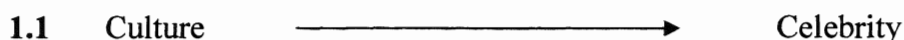
endorsements still rely on the consumer to provide a successful product. McCracken goes on to state that the celebrity world is one of the most potent sources of cultural meaning and the public's fascination with celebrities reflects how mass society involves itself in this meaning transfer:

The consumer does not revere the celebrity merely because the celebrity has done what the consumer wants to do but also because the celebrity actually supplies certain meanings in the consumer. Celebrities create a self out of the elements put at their disposal in dramatic roles, fashioning cultural meaning into a practicable form. When they enter the endorsement process, they make these meanings available in material form to the consumer. Consumers are grateful for these meanings and wish to build a self from them (2005:110).

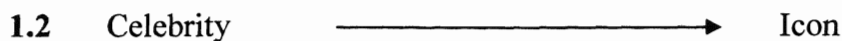
While McCracken's diagram is a good foundation for celebrity endorsements, a new model needs to be developed with the rise of signabrands since the celebrity endorser has now become the creator as well. In a traditional celebrity endorsement, a company sponsors an individual to wear a particular item. A famous example is Nike paying Michael Jordan to wear their Nike shoes. When a celebrity sports a unique product, the company behind the product shares the spotlight. This is what I call a signasponsor: the celebrity acquires a sufficient star status for a company to risk financial capital. A signastar is a celebrity who wears a non-sponsored branded product that becomes a part of the star's signature look. An example is Avril Lavigne wearing Dickies workgear (see chapter six).

However, in a signabrand relationship, a new type of celebrity endorsement model has emerged. Here the star *is* the brand in question because the star is perceived to be the designer. Air Jordan is made by Nike, but 50 Cent's sneaker is made by his company G-Unit⁴. Although Reebok makes this sneaker and Mark Ecko

is the designer, in actuality their association is not equal to 50 Cent. Celebrity clothing designers such as P. Diddy and Gwen Stefani are considered full-fledged designers, treated at fashion seasons the same way that traditional designers are. The list of celebrity designers is ever-growing. Jessica Simpson has just announced her Sweet Kisses line for 2006⁵ and a veritable Britney Jr, Hilary Duff, will launch a fragrance to correspond with her clothing line, Stuff. To understand how meaning is transferred to signabrands, I would like to expand on McCracken's model using the same three stages but with six distinct processes.

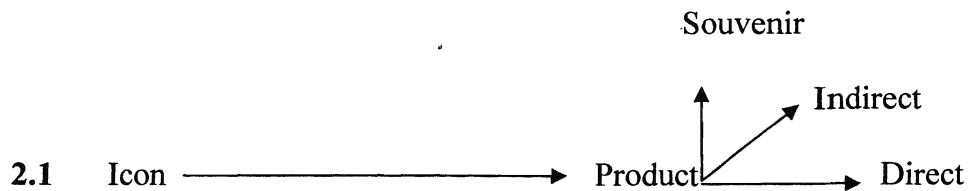


Consumers find meaning in celebrities and begin to define their own taste patterns. They relate to some celebrities more than others and actively engage in experiencing pleasure through the celebrity. While some celebrities are temporary and others evolve into stars, what is significant here is that meaning is found in somebody else, and through that person consumers' other likes and dislikes emerge.



An icon is a celebrity who is referenced within a particular genre, movement, clique or lifestyle, becomes known for certain things and manages to repeat that success. The public becomes familiar with an icon's characteristics, which become a natural association. The public then begins to adopt and accept certain attributes like

dress or mannerisms. Icons differ from celebrities in that companies invest in them to carry out their mission statements. While companies use celebrity endorsements, icons are the ones who are repeatedly used over a long period of time. Icons are created through the way in which the public transfers meaning. Icons *have been chosen by the public* because they have some quality that a wide assortment of people can relate to. While there may be prettier actors than Pamela Anderson, she is still an icon of sex appeal, as she becomes a common reference point.⁶



The icon now becomes represented in some product form. In McCracken's model, the celebrity must have characteristics that are similar to the product being endorsed. With signabrands, the nature of the product becomes more complex because the product is a direct representation of the icon. A product that involves an icon can be comprised of three different types: souvenir, indirect and direct. *Souvenir* items are those items that can be purchased in avenues directly related to the icon and are purely for fan worship. Examples include T-shirts from a concert tour, celebrity calendars and posters. *Indirect* products are those that an icon is paid to endorse without having sole involvement in the product at hand. Christina Aguilera may have not had input into Skechers design, yet she is solely hired by the shoe company to pose in the ads. *Direct* products are extensions of an icon's lifestyle, making the icon

both designer and brand (signabrands). These direct products represent the point of departure from McCracken's (2005) meaning movement and endorsement process model.

2.2 Direct Product Brand

Rather than just a fan who worships an icon's lifestyle, a brand allows a fan a legitimate way of becoming intimately connected with the icon as "the chosen idol has to convey the ideals of a brand, and its integrity as a popular choice for consumers: a brand represents not just a product, but a philosophical predisposition, a lifestyle choice and an idea to live by that is sought after by consumers because of its affiliation with celebrity" (Trifonas and Balomenos, 2003:246). The brand is a gut feeling of association that, while an indirect representation, embodies the icon's lifestyle. The brand is a distinct marker of identity and it transfers meaning to others. The brand becomes a way of promoting an individual's style as well as the style of the icon in question. The branded direct product is a deeper extension than a tour T-shirt as it provides a sense of legitimacy, exclusivity and is also regarded as fashion. Eminem's Shady Ltd. label allows consumers to define themselves in a certain way because the brand provides hip-hop lovers with a series of style options. These style options indicate a credible appreciation of Eminem and are an outlet for personal expression as the consumer chooses pieces within the Shady collection.

3.1 Brand Designer

While certain brands merely act as brands in themselves, others showcase their designers as brands. Designer Marc Jacobs produces his own line, Marc by Marc Jacobs, and is also the creative director of Louis Vuitton.⁷ John Galliano designs his own collection and is creative director of Christian Dior. Tommy Hilfiger is not only the name of a brand but of its designer as well. The same applies to Donna Karan, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren. Gucci's past successful creative director Tom Ford noted that designers were not merely designers anymore – they were name-brand engines (Menon, 2005:C3). This permeability between designer and brand allows signabrands to be accepted in the fashion foray: if icon Karl Lagerfeld can oversee the Fendi Group, design his own collection and another for the H&M Chain, then icon P. Diddy can oversee Bad Boy records, be a hip hop artist and run the Sean John brand.

Once the peak of a fashion icon's ambition was to attain endorsement status; now an icon is incomplete until he or she achieves the status of "designer." The designer is the person capable of guiding a brand's lifestyle. The designer becomes the definitive spokesperson for the brand and the advertising created for that brand evokes a lifestyle that the designer wants to portray. The designer is responsible for the shifting and changing collections that reflect the mood of society and aiding in the process of icon formation. The music artist who achieves iconic status may now be transformed into the designer as well; if designers can be celebrities, it also follows that celebrities can become designers. Any sense of merit almost disappears as long as one can achieve celebrity status.

3.2 Designer —————> Consumer

Whether or not the designer is a music artist, the consumer still has to find meaning in the designer and the direct product has to resonate with a large number of people. Depending on the designer, the outlets where one can purchase collections also determine the success. Alexander McQueen's collection is exclusive and is showcased in limited stores such as Holt Renfrew. Gwen Stefani's collection is *exclusive* to Holt Renfrew.⁸ With L.A.M.B. only available at Holt Renfrew, the designer has directly indicated who this collection is intended for. Stefani wants to be perceived as a fashionista, one who takes fashion seriously (although she has recently put out a new lower-priced line called Harajuku Lovers). P. Diddy's Sean John has its own boutiques the way that other designers do. The icon-as-designer projects a lifestyle into a brand. Where the brand can be purchased segments consumers into projected demographics. Still, consumers have responded to Stefani, as L.A.M.B. is projected to earn \$40 million in sales this year.⁹ Jennifer Lopez's JLO line is doing well with \$200 million in sales, but it is sold in more accessible outlets than L.A.M.B. Hence, the lifestyle that the artist projects determines where the products are sold.

Britney Dropped Her Baby, But Not the Brand: Spears' True Contribution

While McCracken provides a useful framework for the celebrity endorsement process, the model needs to be expanded when an icon turns into a designer because the process becomes far more complex. While anybody can become a celebrity, becoming an icon-designer is an indication that the consumer is willing to embrace a certain lifestyle and it exposes the artist in a new way. The usual music buying process involves listening to a song, watching the corresponding video, downloading a few tracks, previewing the record at the music store and then purchasing it. The situation that presents itself now is that a consumer may buy music artists' clothes and after that begin listening to their music.

Britney Spears is the paradigmatic case of the direct investment of music artists in the fashion design process. By performing content analysis, one can determine her signature looks and what influences resulted because of these looks (see chapter four). If Spears were not portrayed in so many styles, referenced to in terms of shopping and complicit in teen consumption, these designer synergies would have never occurred. Although Spears was not the first music artist to launch a perfume or fashion collection, through her mass popularity, she gave other artists the confidence to bring their signabrands to market. P. Diddy's Sean John label came out nearly five years ago, at he was being transformed from celebrity to icon. Spears managed to stay in the celebrity news for almost five years as well, building herself to icon status; others copied her ability to generate media attention for their own initiatives, resulting in signabrands.

Yet most writing concerning Spears and popular music still revolves around sexuality and gender politics. Books such as *Female Chauvinist Pigs* (2005) get

advance praise for their condemnation of female behaviour regarding attire and attitudes towards sex. In only the *third sentence* of the book, Spears is referenced: “Britney Spears was becoming increasingly popular and increasingly unclothed, and her undulating body ultimately became so familiar to me I felt like we used to go out” (Levy, 2005:3). Spears was certainly part of a porno-chic culture (see chapter five), but analyses of her contributions have focused on the representation of sexuality, not on the impact of the consumption of “the look.”

If feminist analysis has focused on sexuality, scholarly research on the relationship between music and fashion has long been dominated by the subculture approach. How styles, or attitudes about sexuality, shift may be attributed to the fashion cycle (see chapter two) but the internal dynamics of the cycle have been ignored. Rather, the focus is on results - new styles are linked to new lifestyle movements and changes in attitude towards sex are related to feminist discourse. The process behind such results only emerges through changes in consumptive practices. Therefore, to get at the root of any shifts in popular culture one has to assess how a mass audience consumes cultural products and then track when shifts happen. While a correlation does not imply cause, the popularity of Britney Spears and the backlash against her were not because of her sexy attire but were due to her role as a vehicle for consumption and the natural evolution of the fashion cycle.

While issues of *Feminist Media Studies* have acknowledged popular music artists’ sexual capital, the consumptive capital that these artists possess is still under-theorized. Shugart and Waggoner note that female music artists and their performances constitute a spectacle of hyped-up femininity:

It's not just Madonna's shtick anymore: From Beyonce's "bootyliciousness" to Janet Jackson's cinematic wardrobe malfunction to Britney Spears' amalgamation of ingenue/sexual sophisticate, the landscape of contemporary popular culture is littered with mediated spectacles in the form of outrageous performances of femininity. With their excessive, dissonant, random, eclectic, and highly sensational performances, available in myriad mediated images and texts, contemporary popular music stars like Christina Aguilera and Jennifer Lopez provide additional proof of the ready availability of female spectacle for popular consumption (2005:65).

The authors go on to claim that artists Macy Gray and Gwen Stefani provide subversive transgressive spectacular performances which counter dominant discourses of femininity and female sexuality. To compare Macy Gray to Beyonce, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera and Jennifer Lopez is incongruent as the latter four females are legitimate superstars while Macy Gray, although a talented performer, is a one-hit wonder. If instead the authors had chosen Pink, who attained large commercial success without conforming to traditional notions of femininity, the argument would have been at least believable.¹⁰ As for Stefani, she is far more dangerous to representations of femininity than Spears ever was, as she exaggerated the notions of consumption using her gender.

Stefani manages to come across as a confident, strong, tough female because she embodies a unique style which does not conform to any prescribed definitions, she fronts a rock band and she does not exhibit dance moves so much as a gritty in-your-face style. Having all of these qualities does not make one more or less feminine.¹¹ As much as Stefani provides an alternative model of female behaviour, she commodifies her actions only for consumers who can afford to shop at Holt Renfrew. There is nothing subversive, alternative or transgressive about Holt

Renfrew. The store is capitalism at its finest, filled with luxurious and expensive products. Stefani's fashions are offered to consumers solely through this avenue and this dictates the class status of her fans and followers. So yes, you can kick-box and wear sweatpants with a sequined bra, but you can only wear Stefani's trackpants if you discover Holt Renfrew and are prepared to pay the \$150 price tag.¹² At least Britney Spears' scent *Curious* was in a price range accessible to most consumers. Given the variety of artist/icon/designers, the interesting research question is not why Beyonce portrays a different type of sexuality in her videos than does Kylie Minogue (Railton and Watson, 2005: 62) but why both of them have become brands and what meaning this has for female consumers.

The signabrand relationship and the process behind it is the result of the ongoing nature of cultural political economy combined with the postmodern condition (see chapters three and six). Postmodernism is not a complete break with modernism, but rather a cultural dominant that allows for change while being aware that this change is under the rubric of capitalism. How mass society expresses itself in popular culture is through commodified goods such as fashion and something as common as a hooded sweatshirt provides multiple meanings. These meanings come from the design, label, brand and imprint that is on it. To merely treat the hooded sweatshirt as just a form of production or consumption ignores the "disconcerting" presence of postmodernism, which "subjects the assumed realities of political economy to question" (Smart. 1992:194).

As traditional political economy is questioned by postmodernism, subculture theory is also part of an assumed reality that is far from certain. Melissa Campbell

notes that there are three particular problems with the subcultural model: its emphasis on homology and the reification of the ‘four elements’; its insistence on authenticity and resistance, and its focus on indigeneity (2004:499). The ‘four elements’ of subculture — dress, music, argot and ritual – are far more fluid than subcultural theory has acknowledged; for example, one can enjoy and be very knowledgeable about a form of music without participating in other elements. Subcultures were thought to construct identities in opposition to a ‘parent culture’ that severely curtailed the social roles available to them, but the ‘parent culture’ is now the shopping mall selling all of these supposed subcultural styles as signabrand. As David Chaney notes, “the once-accepted distinction between ‘sub’ and ‘dominant’ culture can no longer be said to hold true in a world where the so-called dominant culture has fragmented into a plurality of lifestyle sensibilities and preferences” (2004:47).

While the term subculture is still used in to discuss lifestyle formation other terms such as indie rock have emerged.

Indie rock claims for itself a kind of vacuous existence, independent of the economic and political forces, as well as the value systems and aesthetic criteria, of large-scale production. At the same time, in its manifestation as “indie” (not “independent”), indie rock mystifies itself, its more literal meanings giving way to something both trendy and exclusive. For those on the “outside,” the link between “indie” and “independent” is never necessarily made, thus preserving its meaning as something of an enigma, something other people know. One can begin to see, then, that indie rock exists largely as an absence, a nebulous “other,” or as a negative value that acquires meaning from what it opposes (Hibbett, 2005:58).

If people say they like indie rock, it does not in fact mean that they only like independent music – that is, music not released on a major label. Rather, they ascribe to a lifestyle and aesthetic that allows them to be part of an uncategorizable category

which is based in the roots of punk subculture - deconstruction and authenticity.¹³ No matter what such off -shoots are called, there is a fine line between being self-reflexive and having anti-commercial purity (Moore, 2004:323). The term “indie rock” is simply another classification based on these two modes of culture that oppose the mainstream, which is what subcultures were initially thought to do. In the 1990s the term “alternative” was used to state an opposition to the mainstream but as the notion of alternative became commercialized, indie is now used to connote a do-it-yourself approach. Indie allows for different modes of music and for the utilization of new musical tools (Székely, 2006, 106). As indie becomes socially saturated (a crucial step in the fashion cycle), the mainstream then slowly becomes ever more diverse and encompasses even fragmented niche audiences which eventually will alter the signabrand relationship.

Music and fashion have combined in new ways to represent lifestyle formation rather than subcultures. A certain lifestyle can be communicated through dress or music but these do not have to be in any way congruent. Signabrand fashions provide a type of fast-food lifestyle formation where one’s lifestyle is reflected through an icon. As Rob Shields attests “consumption for adornment, expression and group solidarity become not merely the means to a lifestyle, but the enactment of lifestyle”(1992:16). The ideology of a subculture has been replaced with an idol/icon in which expression is through signabrands. Signabrands are the acting out of lifestyles we associate with the artist but they are constructed lifestyles. 50 Cent is not driving around shooting people, JLO is not dancing on a yacht, Britney Spears is not running through a hotel room, and

Blink 182 are not at the local skate park. Yet the combination of magazine and music video create a supposed lifestyle that these icons' respective signabrand communicate to consumers.

The foreword to the book *Fashion Now* (2003), states that fashion designers are like meteorologists forecasting fashion for the future and what the public will need. This is an appropriate analogy as signabrand have the opportunity to forecast mainstream style and, consequently, values. However, like weather, style can change in an instant, and what was once all the rage is on the clearance racks. But, not everybody listens to forecasts. Just because somebody tells you that it is going to rain may not convince you to take your umbrella unless the forecaster or station is highly trusted. And just like that bond with the forecaster or station, the same happens with the designer and music artist. The forecaster and station begin to have the same associations in the way the music artist and designer become one and the same. They become a place of trust – *Gwen Stefani looks good and sounds good so her fashion label must be good as well.*

The process of signabranding is still in a primary stage, and with new icons will come alternative analyses of this process of meaning that consumers will experience. Icon formation will change depending on who the next icon is and it will alter the signabrand process. Britney Spears has had her peak run, and I welcome this type of exploration on the next music icon. In no way do I condemn or advocate liking Britney Spears, or anybody for that matter (except Green Day!), but somehow she has managed to resonate with the public and the meanings that consumers extract from her are important for the study of popular culture. I would like to see future

studies emerge that analyze how consumers discover music that is part of such fragmented cultures. Anything on the Top 40 is accessible through continuous radio, mall and video play, but I am convinced that most listeners of music have something on their playlists that is not considered mainstream. How one discovers new music and forms a taste for certain genres, and then perhaps a fashion style or lifestyle, is a study that would put the subculture model to rest once and for all.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER SEVEN

¹ Designers Dolce and Gabbana released their epic coffee-table book entitling it *Music* (2004) and the packaging resembles a LP box set.

² This reference is to Spears' second perfume release, *Fantasy*, to which Spears claims is much better than her best-selling first scent, *Curious*. At the end of the 2004 holiday season, *Curious*, the new fragrance "by" Britney Spears was the top body product seller on Amazon.com and manufacturer Elizabeth Arden announced that it was the top selling fragrance in U.S. department stores (Press Release, December 2004 http://www.elizabetharden.com/Corporate/press_releases.asp).

³ The first experimental evidence that ads can indeed transfer cultural meaning from ad characteristics (such as endorser personality) to brands, even when the personality assertions are not communicated verbally and explicitly, was performed by Batra and Homer in the article "The Situational Impact of Brand Image Beliefs" in *Journal Of Consumer Psychology*, 14(3), 318–330. McCracken's untested but influential model has now been validated only for the model to change with the emergence of signabrands.

⁴ Thug-rapper 50 Cent has a five year deal with Reebok International, a video game, sponsorship with Glaceau beverages, and clothing line G-Unit, produced under license by Ecko Unlimited and expected to generate about \$55 million in wholesale revenue this year. (Leeds, Jeff. (2004). \$50 Million for 50 Cent." *The New York Times*, Sunday December 26, Arts and Leisure Section.pg 2.)

⁵ Website www.asos.com (As Seen On Stars) features clothes from various designers that stars have worn. In the denim section, the majority of the denim is low-rise. Here is a caption about jeans that Jessica Simpson has worn:

* *Faded wash, low-waisted jeans*

* *Diamante trim on back pockets*

* *Inspired by Seven jeans*

* *Influence red label tag stitched into seam*

* *In the style of Jessica Simpson*

Get some of Newlywed's star Jessica Simpson's sexy, girly style with these low waisted super tight jeans from Influence! With a faded, vintage wash and sparkly diamante trim on the back pockets, they're the perfect pair for a glam night out with the girls!

While not everybody will acquire the exact same brand or style of jean as Jessica Simpson, retailers will appropriate this look so that it looks similar to this pair. As Simpson's popularity increases, she now becomes her own brand with a \$10 million licensing deal.

(<http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/story/249192p-213405c.html>)

⁶ Pamela Anderson has appeared on six *Playboy* magazine covers, boosted *Baywatch* ratings, appeared in sex tape with rocker Tommy Lee and created the show V.I.P. She plays upon the "blonde-bimbo" role and had a Comedy Central roast in her honour where comedians and celebrities mocked her special skills. She has become the pinnacle of sex appeal as whenever an attractive female is required, she is willing to play the role as witnessed on the 2006 Juno awards.

⁷ N.E.R.D. lead singer Pharrell Williams paired up with Louis Vuitton designer Marc Jacobs to co-create a line of eyewear. This is not Pharrell's first foray into the world of fashion. He recently launched a limited edition Ice Cream shoe collection and the Billionaire Boys Club clothing line for Reebok's RBK range. (http://www.fashionunited.co.uk/news/film_tv.htm)

⁸ <http://www.l-a-m-b.com/site/findus.aspx> .On October 2nd, 2004 Holt Renfrew launched the fall 2004 collection.

⁹ <http://www.latimes.com/features/lifestyle/la-et-stefani14sep14,1,3770369.story?coll=la-headlines-lifestyle&ctrack=1&cset=true>

¹⁰ The authors note *Tragic Kingdom* as the first No Doubt record release when in fact it is their second (67).

¹¹ Stefani's appropriation of Japanese culture and her use of her Harajuku Girls, four non-speaking Asian women who act as her entourage, runs on borderline racism.

¹² At the Holt Renfrew flagship store in downtown Toronto, Stefani's L.A.M.B is designated a section on the third floor like any other designer brand. Although the line does include dresses and evening wear, the majority of the collection consists of sweatshirts and trackpants ranging from \$150-\$450. Stefani's face is not on the tags or displays, and the line is merchandised near the denim collection and popular fleece brand Juicy Couture. The label is one that has to be sought for and provides a certain exclusivity that cannot be attained through mass promotion. Any sense of Stefani's DIY aesthetic as an alternative notion of female spectacle is hard to accept when it is commodified not as street culture, but as couture culture.

¹³ On the Aritzia website, (a popular retailer for girls) the merits of indie rock are praised. Britney is out and Broken Social Scene is in. The website then provides links to such indie rock websites such as www.pitchforkmedia.com. The year 2006 looks like indie rock becomes normal rock. And so the fashion cycle looms again.

Appendix One – Discography

B in the Mix: The Remixes

Released: November 22, 2005

Greatest Hits: My Prerogative

Released: November 9, 2004

Videos Released:

“My Prerogative”

Director: Jake Nava

Do Somethin’

Co-Directors: Billy Woodruff/Britney Spears

In The Zone

Released: November 18, 2003

Videos Released:

“Me Against The Music”

Director: Paul Hunter

“Toxic”

Director: Joseph Kahn

“Everytime”

Director: David LaChapelle

Britney

Released: November 6, 2001

Videos Released:

“I’m A Slave 4U”

Director: Frances Lawrence

“Overprotected”

Director: Wayne Isham

U.K. Only Release

“I’m Not A Girl, Not Yet A Woman”

Director: Wayne Isham

“Overprotected (Dark Child Remix)”
Director: Chris Applebaum

“I Love Rock And Roll”
Director: Chris Applebaum
European Release Only

“Boys (Coed Remix)”
Director: Chris Applebaum

Oops!... I Did It Again
Released: May 16, 2000

Videos Released:

“Oops!...I Did It Again”
Director: Nigel Dick

“Lucky”
Director: David Meyers

“Stronger”
Director: Joseph Khan

“Don’t Let Me Be The Last To Know”
Director: Herb Ritts

...Baby One More Time
Released: January 12, 1999

Videos Released:

“...Baby One More Time”
Director: Nigel Dick

“Sometimes”
Director: Nigel Dick

“(You Drive Me) Crazy”
Director: Nigel Dick

“Born To Make you Happy”
Director: Billy Woodruff (European Release Only)

“From The Bottom of My Broken Heart”
Director: Gregory Dark

Appendix Two
Content Analysis of Britney Spears in Magazines 2002-2004

Various magazines with Britney Spears on the cover were coded to determine her signature looks.

Magazines	no.of pictures	Cover Caption	Clothing Worn	Comments about her	Comments about her look
	340 (Total)				
Entertainment					
US Weekly Dec 23 2002 410	13	War is on – Britney vs. Justin	“sexi” tanktop, fedora, dump him t-shirt, midriff showing - jeans		Britney Spears on welfare
US Weekly Jan 20 2003 414	14	Why I'll Always love Justin	newsboy cap, cowboy boots, silver jumpsuit, bra/miniskirt	voted best least-dressed female	oops Britney cropped it again
			pg. 70 - Jessica Simpson wearing fedora, lowrise jeans, bra/jacket	3rd - hottest body	
				readers choice 8-times	
				New uniform at St.Britney Spears (about Tatu)	
People Sept 29, 2003	6	best and worst dressed	page six six six shirt, mini, leggings/ fedora		Britney, Lil Kim go home and change
					we're begging: never let her wear us outside her 'Sweatin to the Oldies class"
			black and white combo, halter top,		
			booty shorts		
People October 13, 2003	10	Britney Spears: Girl Gone Wild?	three tiny-t's - page sixsixsix. I want candy, dump him, Midriff		Ugg boots
			white lingerie wedding dress		
US Weekly March 17 2003 422	7	Britney and The Beast	von dutch tanktop	about Alicia Keys - two more sit ups and I'll look like Britney	designer debut - talk about making own line of von dutch
			midriff-croptop/skirt		
			white dress shirt/jeans		
US Weekly August	17	why she can't	lingerie/black dress,		pink power

18 2003 444		find a man	small pink dress		
			white tanktop/midriff/ sun hat	about Debbie Allen - Did she steal Britney Spears' hat and Wonder Woman's boots?	Britney's New Striptease: From Squeaky Clean to Obscene
			small white dress		
			lace top/midriff white skirt		
			hat/fur coat		
			red bikini		
US Weekly Sept 1 2003 446	10	Britney's Revenge	pink lingerie/lace top, midriff, low-rise jeans	about Alicia Keys - Britney Spears called - she wants her hat back	famous body part - belly button
			newsboy cap/white crop top		
			cowboy boots/frilly pink skirt/t-shirt		
US Weekly Oct 13 2003 452	9	Britney's New Boyfriend	green tight tee/midriff/ripped jeans/		Britney Spears has already snapped up a charity cotton tee for the wildlife conservation society
			fedora		
			pink tight t-shirt - miss b-haven		
			jeans, baggy white dress shirt, newsboy cap		Britney's Magazine Striptease
					Why is she stripping down?
			sweater mini dress, black knee high		about the dress: knit me baby one more time
			boots, bikini black underneath		
					it's crochet Barbie
					good friends call her Knitney
					Next time wash the hula-hoop
					some rugs are better left on the bathroom floor
US Weekly Nov 10 2003 456	16	Plastic Surgery Under 30	suit look - tie, lingerie		Where's the Barbie that came with that purse?
			beige tank top		
		note: linked to John Cussack			
			light blue sweat pants/ pink hoodie		
			jeans/black coat/ fedora		

			capri jeans/black top		
			fur coat		
			hot pink low cut dress		
			designer Versace bag, sweat pants,		
			Police rock-band t-shirt		
In Touch January 19, 2004	11	why she did it	in wedding dress, boy toy belt		what did she wear? Scruffy jeans, a garter
			halter top with lace neck/midriff/		a midriff bearing black top and a Von Dutch
			low-rise jeans/belt buckle		baseball cap
			jeans-low-rise/tiny-t, white fur fedora		Is Britney a real blonde?
			brown fur collar coat		oops! Outfits - she also misses in these baggy ill-fitting jeans
			hot pink dress, fake pink fur coat		
			nude colour sheer ruffle gown,		"the best part is the fans, like loving you- and the free clothes" - Brit on being a star
			peacock feather coat, jeans, belt		
Teen Magazines					
J- 14 Oct/Nov 2002	6	sad movies and boyfriends make Brit Cry	low cut black gown		criticized for her eccentric ensemble, especially for her clingy skirt.
			very short pink halter dress, cross necklace		Nelly approved though. He likes "apple-bottomed women" like Britney when he launches his line of woman's jeans later this year
			beige tank-top, midriff showing		
J-14 Oct/Nov 2003	6	what Brit's been thinking about	black fedora, page sixsixsix shirt/ midriff, leggings		
					resolutions stars should make: Britney: Find Pants!
J-14 Jan 2004	14	Britney;s shocking new	dark blue dress		

		love			
					Britney buys Oliver Peoples sunglasses at \$500 a pair
			white sweater dress		
			short black leather dress, biker hat/ strap up heels		from trashy to classy
			long red gown		
M April 2003	11	is there hope for Brit and J	green mini dress		
			fur coat, sweat pants, dump him t-shirt		
			black newsboy hat, black ruffle jacket		
M Oct/ Nov 2003	8	Britney Comes Clean	white hippie tank top, short shorts, pink handbag		to get her mind off boys, Brit says she loves to shop at her fave stores Urban Outfitters and Anthropologie
			low-cut pink dress		
			white underpants, tank top, angel wings		
M September 2002	10	Will Britney Move on?	low rise jeans, tank top		yay- what more does a girl need?
			see-through white sweater, fedora/ cords-brown, legwarmers		nay- But Brit, we forgive you
				Fave female singer - Britney	
			gold sweater turtleneck		
M September 2003	10	Britney's bravest move yet?	green bikini outfit with snake		
			silver mini dress		
			newsboy hat, pink off the shoulder shirt/faded jeans		
			white embroidered blouse		
Seventeen April 2004	3	"The things I did weren't very cool"	white tank top, midriff, low-rise jeans		
			low cut, beaded beige gown		
Cosmo Girl Nov 2003	8	The private side she's never	white tanktop, low -rise jeans, midriff	67% prefer old Brit	

		shown	black tank top, jeans	33% prefer crazy party-girl Brit	
			black dress, ruffled hem		
				no.1 - sexiest chick in music - boys polled	
Elle Girl April 2004	6		strapless black dress		
			snake uniform		
Womens/ Men's Magazines					
Glamour December 2003	5	pop powerhouse BS and 11 more dazzling women of the year	beige, sheer dress		Want Britney's Hair? Her fresh face?
			pink cardigan sweater, midriff,		
			low rise white pants		
			low cut, white dress		
W August 2003	8	is pop's reigning princess cut out to be queen?	dominatrix wear		with a new look
			bra, mini leather jacket, ruffled black mini skirt - all black		
			high heels, one piece cut out swim piece-black		
			lace black dress		
			choker, corset, panties -black		
B December 2003	12	Britney on coming back and kissing Madonna	beige tank top, midriff, low-rise jeans		Britney - the naked truth- ok, ok - it's a flesh coloured dress
			long black dress, low cut, high slit		
			red bikini		
			flesh coloured dress		
Marie Claire June 2004	2	Our Fax from Britney: What I want next	floral, low cut summer dress		
			white low cut dress		

Toronto Fashion Winter 2004	4	Britney Spears: The Music Issue	white gypsy dress, fedora, boots	Pet peeve: Britney Spears' Hair	three cheers for Spears
			black strapless dress, B necklace		
Blender January 2004	15	Britney Busts out	low-rise jeans, spike belt buckle/ leather jacket		"oops...I did it again..forgot my shirt"
			leopard print low-rise jeans/ chain belt		
			Leather jacket		
			white tank-top, jeans, red alligator boots		
			leather jacket, green bra, low rise jeans/ underwear showing, thick belt		
			track suit, skirt, tube top, heels		
Esquire November 2003	4	70 years of women we love	white sweater, no bottoms, heels		
			bikini bottoms, topless, white and black pearls		
GQ November 2003	9	Her sexiest ever shoot!	white tank top, knee boots, short jean shorts	hair, legs, pout...the perfect pop package	
					"I always got in trouble at school for my clothes. I would start the trends and then be the one sent home for them"
			black fringe dress, white boots		
			lace top, sequined mini shorts/ leather jacket		
			wool-all in one zebra striped dress		
			black scuba mini dress		
Q December 2003	13	Britney Gone Wild	green bikini with little white tie, short black shorts		
			halter top-white, short booty shorts/ fishnets		
			white one piece strapless pant suit		
Tabloid Magazines					
Star October 21, 2003	8	Britney's Wild Nights with a	miss b-haven t-shirt		

		married man			
			white-fake fur jacket, midriff		
			green t-shirt, jeans, newsboy cap		
			beige tanktop, kangol		
Enquirer October 21, 2003	4	Britney Home Wrecking Scandal	halter top, midriff, decorated pants		
Star September 2, 2003	10	Britney's Revenge on Justin	short jean shorts, red multi-colour		Fears nothing in Daisy Dukes or gym dandy shorts
			dress shirt		
			daisy duke gym shorts, yellow tank		
			white low cut, frilly dress		
			white long sleeved tshirt, brown skirt, newscape		
Star May 10, 2004	13	Britney Steals Another Woman's Man!	leather cap, jeans, midriff, red tank		
			jeans, black jacket, cross necklace		
			von dutch cap, white dress shirt/		
			jean shorts/yellow bikini top		
Star July 8, 2003	13	Britney Tells all to Star!	football jersey		
			white tanktop		
Star February 17, 2004	11	Hollywood sex stunts! Janet and Britney: Do Stars Go Way too far?	black strapless dress		
			pink turtleneck, ripped jeans		
			black jacket, midriff, sweatpants		
			nude bra, pants, thong showing		
			white lingerie wedding dress		
Star October 1, 2002	5	Britney's Shocking new Life!	green bra, miniskirt		

			tanktop, glasses		
			mini pink dress - low cut		
			white long dress shirt, black church		
			hat, brown pants		
Enquirer, Dec 31, 2002	3	Britney Cocaine Tragedy	white long sleeve shirt, jean shorts		
			orange dress shirt, midriff, low		
			rise jeans, diamond belly button		
Star Dec 17, 2002	3	Britney Cheated with Ben Affleck	shredded white tank top, diamond collar, midriff		
Star March 4, 2003					
	3	Britney Caught with Cocaine	low rise purple pants, thong, purple tank top		
			red dress shirt-no sleeves,		
			studded pants		
			von dutch hat, sleeveless shirt		

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